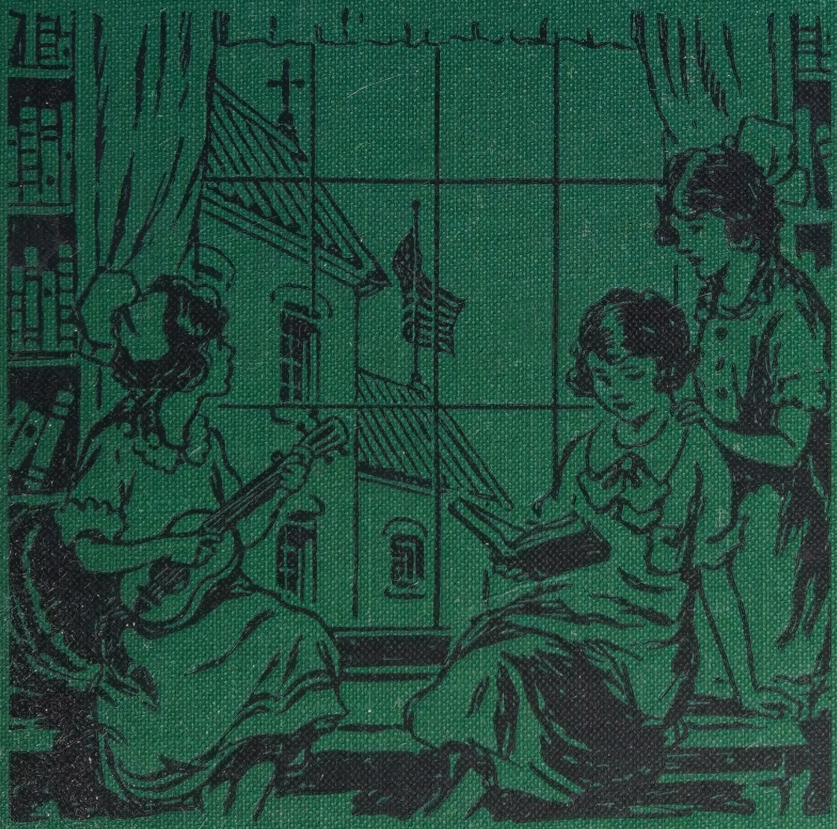
MARY ROSE
AT ROSE GABLES



MARY MABEL WIRRIES

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MARY ROSE AT ROSE GABLES

BOOKS BY MARY MABEL WIRRIES

FOR GIRLS

Cloth, Frontispiece, Uniform, Each, Net, $1.00

MARY ROSE AT ROSE GABLES

The lively heroine of many an escapade shows a new side of her character when she opens a health farm for the unfortunates of a nearby city. The book closes with an episode which betokens a happy future for Mary Rose . . . and a certain young man.

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"Tim, haven't you anything to ask me before you go?"

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MARY ROSE AT ROSE GABLES

By
MARY MABEL WIRRIES
Author of *"Mary Rose at Boarding School"*

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO
BENZIGER BROTHERS
1928

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TO

ABIGAIL AQUILA

SWEETEST OF GRANDMOTHERS

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MARY ROSE AT ROSE GABLES

CHAPTER I

A LITTLE OLD LADY

"TRAIN Number Twenty-Six over the Baltimore and Ohio. Stopping at Frederick, Wilton, Kingsport, Ciderville——"

"That's yours. Oh, dear!" The pretty girl with the red hair sprang to her feet and began to help the tall young man with the equally red hair gather up the other girl's parcels and bags, "Trains always come too soon when you don't want them, and are late when you are in a hurry. I wish we had planned to stay over another day. I'm not nearly talked out."

"You ought to be," said her brother, with a grin, "Lot of chance a poor man has when you "wimmens" get going. Seventeen packages all you had, Posey? You ought to have a parrot and a cat, yet."

"None of your impudence, Tim Malone!" flashed the brown-haired traveler, "I have to bear my own burdens, sir—and no one asked you to count my packages. And if I am oversupplied—well, who bought the candy and the books, the plant for Mumsey, the musical top for Bobby, the paper dolls for Bess, the ——?"

"Mere trifles, young lady, compared to the junk you college girls are always lugging home with you. Come on, for Pete's sake! Do you think the B. & O. is going to hold that train for you?"

"There are other trains," said Mary Rose, serenely, "Goodby, Bride. Write twice a week, won't you?"

"Train Number Twenty-Six over the Baltimore and Ohio. Track Six. 'Bo-o-oard!" roared the caller with exasperating finality.

"Gracious!" Mary Rose seized her packages and ran, while Tim trailed after her with the heavier suitcase.

"Goodby," said Tim, at the steps of the car, "Write twice a week, won't you?"

"Quite likely!" exclaimed Mary Rose, with a mocking grimace.

"A' 'Board!" The brakeman swung on, the

steps rose, the door banged. The train was on its way.

Mary Rose stopped at the first vacant seat, bestowed her luggage under the seat and her parcels on the rack, and then dropped into her place with a sigh of satisfaction. She waved a gay reply to Tim's final adieu, and laughed softly as he adroitly dodged a railway milk truck. Then she took off her bright little hat and fluffed her heavy hair with slender white fingers. Finally she rested her head against the back of the seat and closed her eyes. For the first time in a week, she had a moment to herself and time for rest.

What a hurried week it had been! Packing at school. Bidding goodby to everyone at the Glen. Dashing here and there to all the "stunt" parties given by the varied groups of girls to celebrate the closing of the scholastic year, and their emancipation from studies for two whole months. Journeying up to the city to meet Bride, and shop and chat. Then the two of them spending a day at St. Angela's with the good sisters who had been their friends and teachers, and, while there, witnessing all the changes two years had wrought: the new library, the tea-room, and the beginning of a new chapel-building, to

take the place of the little chapel in the basement.

"It's lovely," Mary Rose told Sister Imelda, "but you're taking away all its hominess from St. Angela's. It's bad enough to have the grade babies parading around in Academy uniforms, and the sophomores we knew lording it over them as the young lady graduates, but look at the other changes. You're taking away all our familiar haunts, and pretty soon we poor old Alumnae won't have a corner to call our own. Substituting a perfectly tame convent-owned tea-room for the forbidden drug store on the corner! Why, even the drug store itself is gone, and some benighted, unsentimental individual is erecting a filling-station there."

"I was not aware that the drug store meant anything to you," said Sister Imelda, "I don't recall that you were ever allowed to go there."

"Of course we weren't—but many's the time, Sister dear, that I calmly walked out the front door after school with the day scholars—usually with Felicity Felton—marched down as far as that drug store, enjoyed a bittersweet sundae, filled my pockets with good things for Bride and Kay, and then slipped back into the grounds by way of the

rear door of the power house—in the back and out the front, you know—and nobody the wiser save Patrick the janitor."

"And I always thought you an honorable girl," mourned Sister Imelda.

Mary Rose had the grace to blush. "For the sins of my thoughtless youth," she begged, "Please forgive me. But, Sister, why change the chapel?"

"You know we've needed the new one for years. The basement chapel was never intended to be anything but temporary, and now that the old convent has been sold and all the nuns are to be housed here for a while, we are hard-pressed for room. The new chapel is a necessity."

"I suppose so, but I'm glad I'm not to be here to see the old chapel go. Dear old chapel! Its associations are so many. The prayers we have said there, the ——"

"The giggles that we, irreverent creatures, have giggled there. We never meant to—" said Bride, "But funny things *would* happen. The dog that came to Benediction; the new girl that genuflected with her back to the altar; the words that were mispronounced by the dignified Senior who led the prayers; the server who fell down the steps; the time Sister

Michael wore her big gingham apron to High Mass on Sunday; the time dear Sister Juliana went to sleep while we were praying, and we said night prayers over three times before she awoke—we couldn't stick a pin in her, you know, as we should have done had it been one of the girls."

"Blessed Bride!" said Mary Rose, on the train, "She doesn't change a bit. It was such fun to be with her for two whole days. There will never be another friend like her—never! I wonder who it was that wrote: 'There is no friend like the old friend, who has shared our morning days.' He knew what he was talking about."

Every month that passed it seemed she missed Bride more. Chums during their four years of high school at St. Angela's, it had been hard for them to go different ways when their academy career ended. They had even planned to go to college together, until circumstances had conspired to alter these plans. Mrs. Malone, Bride's mother, was in failing health, and Bride, who planned to teach, had decided to go to the State normal school which was located in her home town, so that she might stay at home with her parents. Mary Rose Ensley, on the other hand, had dreams

of a literary career, and she had gone away to Mary-Glen College to acquire a broader knowledge of languages, classics, literature, and what she termed in a nonsense ditty, "the this-es and the thats-es," that would "polish up" her mind.

"And after that," Bride's brother Tim had agreed, "we will all agree that it needs polishing."

"I can do even worse than that," admitted Mary Rose, cheerfully, "I can add another immortal stanza to that perfect poem: 'I'm going to a college where I surely hope to find,

The this-es and the thats-es that will polish up my mind.

But my heart is sad and weepy, for the fates are far from kind:

Whilst I *groom* my brains at college, I must leave my *Bride* behind.' "

"Is this seat taken?" A quavering voice interrupted Mary Rose's thoughts.

"No, indeed." Mary Rose removed her hat from the vacant space beside her with an accommodating hand. Then, as she looked at the newcomer, she sprang to her feet.

"Let me help you," she said, kindly, reaching for the old-fashioned telescope, the weight

of which seemed even greater than that of the small body which bore it.

"Thank ye. Thank ye, child. I'll be right glad if ye'll be so kind. I'm a mite tuckered."

"I should think you would be." It was all Mary Rose's strong young arms could accomplish to lift the huge container to the rack beside her parcels. "You ought not to try to lift such a heavy bag. You should have checked it through. Please take my seat by the window. It's much pleasanter. May I help you undo your cape?"

"Yes, dearie child, thank ye." The little old lady submitted herself gratefully to the girl's gentle ministrations, "Yes, I reckon I should 'a checked it. I knew there was sich a way o' doing it, but I was right feard I'd get lost in all that crowd at the station, and I didn't want to miss my train and have to go back to Emmy's. I been visitin' my grand-niece, Emmy. She lives in Kingsport."

"How lovely!" said Mary Rose, sympathetically, "This is such a lovely month for visiting."

"Yes, ain't it? And I ain't been visitin' for nigh onto forty years afore this time. I was plum set on going visitin' once more afore I

died. I reckon I ain't got a much longer time to run around in. I'm eighty-four."

"You don't look it," said Mary Rose, honestly.

"No," with a bit of pride, "I can read middlin' fine print without my glasses, and I got everyone of my teeth but one. I'm right spry, too. Or I was, but it kind o' took the tuck out of me, going to Emmy's." She sighed, "I didn't have a very good time."

"That's too bad." Mary Rose was interested and amused. This was such a quaint little old lady. She wore an old-fashioned black dress with a very tight waist, and a full skirt—and it was decorated with buttons from neck to hem. She wore a tiny black silk-and-straw bonnet that tied under her chin, a large black alpaca cape, black cotton gloves, and black shoes with elastic gores on either side in lieu of ties. Even the handkerchief with which she wiped the tiny beads of perspiration from her upper lip and forehead, helped to complete her ensemble, for it was edged with a broad ruffle of black lace. Her clothes were not only black, but they were also rusty from long years of "best" wear. Mary Rose could easily picture her starting for church forty years before, attired in the same outfit.

She was like a little old lady who had just stepped from the pages of a story book. But it wasn't only her clothes that attracted Mary Rose. It was her personality. She was like a tiny, talkative wren, chirping and chirping, her bright, shrewd eyes fixed on Mary Rose, and her tiny, wrinkled, claw-like hands clutching her rusty black purse, the while she perched nervously on the edge of her seat, seeming just ready to fly.

"Didn't you like Kingsport?" asked Mary Rose.

"I don't rightly know. I didn't get a chanct to see much of the town. I guess Emmy was ashamed of me, or something, for she just kept me right in the house, and whenever they had company—Emmy is quite high-flown, and they had a consid'ble lot of comp'ny evenings—she'd say, 'I know you're too tired to come down tonight, Aunt Aquila. You just trot off to bed early and I'll have the maid bring you a glass of warm milk.' Nice, polite way o' getting shet o' me, I took it. Onct I just took things in my own hands, and went down. I had my front hair done up on curl papers all afternoon a-purpose so I'd be ready, and I put on this dress. It's always been good enough for my Sunday-go-to-meet-

in', and I thought it was plenty good enough for Emmy's comp'ny. Land! You oughta see the look she gi' me. If looks could 'a killed, I'd be four feet under the sod right now. Land! There's the conductor-man. Wait'll I get my ticket." And her trembling, blue-veined hands began to fumble through her purse in nervous haste.

"What's this? What's this?" The conductor peered at the ticket through his glasses and then he shoved the glasses to the end of his nose and peered over them at the owner of the ticket. "Martinsburg, Grandma? Your ticket says Martinsburg."

"Well, and what of it?" demanded the old lady, testily, "That's what I want it to say. That's where I'm aimin' to go. And I ain't anybody's grandmother, young feller. I never had nary chick nor child o' my own, though land knows I took care of enough of 'em for other folkses."

"Hey, Jim!" The conductor hailed the brakeman, who was passing through the car, "Where did this lady tell you she wanted to get off, when she got on at Kingsport?"

"Clarksburg, I understood her."

"Her ticket says Martinsburg," said the conductor.

The brakeman scratched his head and looked worried.

"Yes, and I told you Martinsburg," snapped the little old lady, getting very rosy and excited, and trembling more than ever, "There must be something wrong with your hearing if you thought I said Clarksburg. I'm eighty-four years old, and I could 'a told the difference with only one ear open. Well, young feller, what's wrong? Come to the p'int."

"All right, Grandma—I mean, ma'am. You're just going the wrong way, that's all. Your train was due five minutes after this one left Kingsport. This train goes to Clarksburg, all right, but not to Martinsburg."

"She can go back on Fifty-Nine," said the brakeman, "We can turn her over to Jack Reilly at Ciderville and he'll get her back to Kingsport. There's another train out of Kingsport about eleven-forty-five, ma'am, that will take you to your destination. I'm mighty sorry this happened, but I surely understood you to say Clarksburg. This your grip up here? We're getting into Ciderville."

"You ain't a mite sorrier than I be," said the old lady, "Land!"

Her fingers shook as she tried to fasten her

cape and adjust her gloves. "Land!" she exclaimed again, and looked so pitifully white and scared that Mary Rose's heart contracted with pity, "Child, what'll I do? I just won't go back to Emmy's, and I'll be nigh scared to death in that big station all alone until midnight. S'pose I get on the wrong train again?" Her voice was more tremulous than her hands.

"Oh, you poor little soul!" Almost automatically Mary Rose jumped up and began to take down her own baggage and bundles, "You're not going back alone, because I'm going with you. I can just send a wire to Mumsey and not go home until tomorrow. I'd be worrying about you all night if I let you go alone. Dear, now I wish I didn't have so many bundles—but we'll manage, won't we? Come on, dearie, the train's slacking. Be careful, don't fall. This is such a tiny station they stop only a minute. I'm going with her—" this to the conductor, "I'll take care of her. She's too nervous to go alone."

"That's mighty fine of you, Miss," said the conductor, heartily. "Jim's explaining matters to the agent here, and he'll see that it doesn't cost you any extra fare for your kindness. Hey, Jim, this young lady's going

along with the other lady. Fix it up for both of them."

"I don't know how to thank you, child," said the old lady, when they were once more in Kingsport, eating a delicious supper in a cosy corner of the station restaurant.

"You needn't try," said Mary Rose, "I'm so glad I happened to be sitting with you so I could help. We're going to have a long, delightful evening until your train time. Mumsey won't worry, now that she has received my wire. She'll only be disappointed, but I'm sure I am doing just what she would wish me to do."

Well she knew that Mumsey was disappointed. At home, even now, she would be mourning over the roasted chicken, the chocolate cake, the home-made ice-cream, and all the other good things with which she was wont to feast her dear elder daughter on her home-coming night. Small Bess would probably cry and refuse to eat a bite. Bobby would not refuse to eat—not he. Eating was one thing which no small boy of Bobby's age ever refuses. But he would do a vast amount of grumbling. And poor Mumsey and Daddy would be bewildered, and wonder what it was all about, for she had not ex-

plained her delay in the telegram, merely stating that she was staying in Kingsport over night and would be home in the morning. Mary Rose was disappointed, too, for it had been such a long time since the spring vacation, and she was eager to see her dear ones, and help them open all the surprise packages she had brought them, which included a goodly number from Tim and Bride, besides her own purchases. But her own disappointment she put resolutely from her, and set herself to the not unenjoyable task of giving old Mrs. Reynolds a happy evening. She could not have done more for her had she been the prettiest girl in the world, and herself her most devoted escort. She checked their baggage, and took the little old lady up town in a taxicab, with a deferential driver whose resplendent uniform filled Aquila Reynolds with wholesome awe, and cushions into which she snuggled like a contented puppy. Mary Rose bought her violets, dew-sweet and fragrant, and pinned them on the faded black dress, with a compliment which brought pink roses into the faded old cheeks. She took her to the finest picture show in town. And when, at eleven-forty-five, she ensconced her comfortably in a convenient seat on the train for

Martinsburg, she left a box of chocolates in her hand, a gaily-covered magazine beside her, and a kiss on her wrinkled face.

"God bless ye, child," said Mrs. Reynolds, with a tiny tear dropping onto her cape. "Ye've been an angel to an old lady. I wish my grand-niece Emmy was more like ye. I'd have enjoyed my visitin' right smart if she had been. Child, would ye mind—would it be too much trouble for ye to write me a little letter once in a while?"

"Trouble!" said Mary Rose, "not a bit of it. I'd love to." And the little old lady knew that she meant it.

CHAPTER II

A HAPPINESS LEGACY

"UNCLE CAL, do you know what I wish?"

It was morning in the Friendville village postoffice, and Mary Rose sat on the money-order counter, swinging her feet back and forth the while she watched the postmaster sort the mail. She had done the same thing many mornings for many years. Even when she was so tiny that her head barely reached the counter, Uncle Cal Davis had been in the habit of swinging her up there, where she would be out of his way and could yet watch him work. This was a most special privilege. Every child in the village was a friend to Calvin Davis. They ate his peppermints, rummaged in his wastebaskets, listened to his ever-old, ever-new funny stories—but Mary Rose Ensley was the only child who had ever presumed to sit on his money-order counter. And there you have her status in the mind and heart of Uncle Cal, and also of his wife, Aunt

Lina. At twenty Mary Rose still presumed to sit on the money-order counter at the post-office, and to help herself to the cookies which Aunt Lina kept in the cracked crock behind the pantry door.

"Most girls your age," said Uncle Cal, sagely, "are wishing for a beau, but you're so homely it won't do you a speck of good to wish."

"Uncle Cal Davis! Now I'm not going to tell you what I wish, but I *am* going to do something to make you sorry for your unkind words." And with an expression of determination, Mary Rose slid off the counter and marched to the rear of the room, where she seized an ancient and soiled dust-cloth from its nail before turning her attention to the table that stretched along the rear of the room. Uncle Cal watched her with comical dismay, then, seeing that she meant mischief, he hobbled after her as fast as his rheumatic limb would let him.

"Here, here, Posey. Don't you touch that counter. You'll get things all mussed up, and I won't know where to lay my hand on anything. I know right where to find everything now."

"If you do, you're wiser than Solomon,"

said Mary Rose. She deftly cleared a corner of the trash heap, and began stacking books in some semblance of order, paying no heed to his protests.

"Now, now, Posey, you look here." Uncle Cal was getting desperate. "Don't move them things around like that. There's some catty-logs and valuable reference books there ——"

"Sorry, sir," said Mary Rose, dusting vigorously, "but I'm deaf as a post on that side. If you'll just come around to my other ear and say that again ——" She picked up another armful of the catalogues and valuable reference books, and began sorting them into neat piles.

Uncle Cal actually turned pale. That table had not been dusted since he came into office, and his term of postmastership extended well back into the childhood of most Friendville residents. Onto that table, with pages uncut, and, in many instances, with wrappers unremoved, went all the odd assortment of books and papers and catalogues which had sought the postmaster through the years. All of these he meant some day to read, and he lived in mortal terror lest someone "mix them up," or Aunt Lina, growing

stubborn in one of her annual postoffice "cleaning sprees" (as he called them) should heave one or two, or even all of them, into the wastebasket.

"I said I take it back, you little imp!" he told the adamant Mary Rose, hastily. "You could get a beau without wishing. Your face would put a rose to shame. Your hair is like autumn leaves. Your eyes are like stars. Your nose ——"

"Is like a strawberry," giggled Mary Rose. "All right, you dear old pill. I won't touch your precious possessions, but no more disparaging remarks from you concerning my personal appearance. And I'll never tell you what I wished—never, never! Here comes Freddie with the mail bag. Hurry up and close the window and get busy. I hope I get 'steen letters."

There were a half dozen or so among the papers and magazines that Uncle Cal tossed into her lap.

"Advertisements," said Mary Rose, wrinkling her nose in disdain, and not even opening them. "Oh, goody! Here's one from our Angel. I'm going to open it right away and see when my Merrimans are coming. Did you know they are going to visit us this sum-

mer, Uncle Cal,—soon, too? Their Scotch housekeeper is going to visit her relations in Canada, and Uncle Robert is going up north to catch muskets ——"

"Catch what?" Uncle Cal gave her a quizzical look over his spectacles.

"Oh, you know those big fish—I know muskets isn't right, but I never can remember just what it is. Muskets is as good as anything for a name. You needn't grin about it. I don't see what difference it makes so long as a man catches one and has it shellacked, or stuffed, or its head mounted or embalmed or something—and then sticks it up on the wall or in his store window—or the window of one of his friends, where he can get people to gape at it, while he brags about the tussle it gave him. Men are like children. They have such trivial ambitions."

"Humph! We are, are we? For two cents I wouldn't let you sit on that counter, Miss Impertinence. Let's hear your ambition, young lady. I'll bet you a picayune it's just as trivial as catching a muskie."

"Indeed, it's not." Mary Rose stopped with her letter half out of the envelope to look at him with reproachful eyes. "My ambitions—I have more than one, sir—are great

and serious. I don't mind telling you at least one of them. I hope to write the great American novel."

"So?" Uncle Cal's eyes twinkled beneath their shaggy brows. "And what has that ambition to do with the various young men who park their cars in front of your house in the summer time. I know of one in particular who travels some hundred-odd miles, so they say, and spends a sight of money on gasoline, just to spend a few hours with a young lady whose greatest ambition is to write the great American novel."

Mary Rose blushed slightly. "Your powers of observation are remarkable, Uncle Cal," she said, with an attempt at dignity. "Perhaps you have also noticed that this young man who travels so far and comes so often, always acts as chauffeur for his sister, who has been my dearest friend for lo, these many moons. Besides, did I say that writing the great American novel is my *greatest* ambition? It isn't. I'd like to do something fine and great and wonderful, of course, but I really believe being the kind of wife and mother my mother is, is just about as fine as anything."

"Right you are, Posey, my girl," said Uncle Cal, "and I apologize for ever presuming to

doubt the greatness of your ambition. Better read your letter now before it gets cold. I'd like to know when that little Angela is coming."

"She isn't so little any more," said Mary Rose, beginning to read her letter. "It hardly seems possible, but Angela is getting into her 'teens. Oh!" she gave an exclamation of pleasure, "They're coming the twenty-sixth. Why, Uncle Cal, that's tomorrow! Some of the Scotch relations are sick and the housekeeper is going at once. Angela came home from the academy more than two weeks ago—school was out before I stopped there—and Lewis came from the seminary this week, so they're coming right away. Tomorrow—Uncle Cal, tomorrow! Lewis and Angela and the kiddies. Oh, Uncle Cal, I just have to kiss some one, and it will have to be you!" And, so saying, she jumped from the counter, swooped upon him and deposited an airy kiss on the tip of his ear, and ran away before he could say a word.

She ran all the way up the hill, too, forgetting, for the nonce, that she was twenty, and not fifteen, so eager was she to impart the good news to her mother and the children. The four Merrimans were Mary Rose's

cousins, the motherless children of Mrs. Ensley's brother Richard. Shortly after the death of their mother, some years before this story opens, their father had been sent to Japan to represent his firm, and the four children had made their home with the Ensleys during his absence, which had lasted for nearly two years. The four—high-strung, high-hearted Lewis, sweet and gentle Angela, fat literal-minded Jimmie, and beautiful, mischievous Maureen, had so grown into the hearts of Mary Rose, her parents and brother and sister, that it had been very hard to part with them when at last their father returned and took them to live with him again. Their home was several hundred miles distant, and they could not see them often.

Bess deserted her swing in the yard, and Bobby his hoeing in his pet vegetable garden, to come and meet their sister.

"News, news," she cried, waving her letter at them. "They're coming tomorrow."

No need to tell who they might be. Not when their coming had been the sole topic of conversation in the Ensley household ever since the arrival of the first letter which announced the proposed visit. With glowing faces the six-year-old and the eleven-year-old

were off to break the news to their mother. Mrs. Ensley reacted to the knowledge in typical mother-fashion.

"That's lovely," she said. "Mary Rose, do you suppose you can give Katie some help by baking an extra batch of cookies this afternoon? If Jimmie's appetite is anything like it used to be ——"

"Or if it's grown with the years," said Bobby, "you'd better make it two batches, Posey. Two batches, one ginger and one butterscotch—and maybe some doughnuts ——"

"Maureen would like a gingerbread man," said Bess, "a fat, funny gingerbread man, with clove eyes and a raisin mouth, and coconut hair, like you always used to make for us. I'm quite sure she will 'spect a gingerbread man."

"Lewis likes devil's-food cake," said Mrs. Ensley, thoughtfully.

"And Angela, being an angel, likes angel's-food," said Mary Rose. "But isn't that a large order? Ginger cookies, butterscotch cookies, doughnuts, gingerbread and two kinds of cake."

Mrs. Ensley laughed. "Altogether too large," she said, "although I'm sure every

mouthful would be eaten, if I know my hungry tribe. For today we shall be satisfied with the butterscotch cookies and the gingerbread. Tomorrow is another day, and Katie will have the ironing finished by that time. I shall go upstairs and put fresh linens on the spare room for Lewis. It will seem like home to him to sleep there again."

"I have to go and see about my dolls," said Bess, importantly. "I'll want them all dressed up to see their Aunt Maureen."

"Ho, ho!" Bobby laughed uproariously. "Aunt Maureen! If girls aren't beany!"

"Bobby!" reproved his mother.

"'Scuse me. But they are beany, you know, Mumsey. Beanier than beany. Dolls and aunting! A fellow wouldn't think of such junk."

"I'd rather have a doll than an old dirty turtle," said Bess, indignantly.

"Gee! I never caught any flies for Christopher Columbus today. Bet the poor old fellow's starving. Call me when the cookies are about out of the oven, Pose," and Bobby was off to feed his turtle, which he kept in an old tub behind the garage.

"Here's the rest of the mail, Mumsey," said Mary Rose, when the children had gone. "I

didn't open the other letters, but they look like ads of one kind or another. I'll go up and get into an apron, and then I'll do that baking. If you'll wait until I'm finished, I'll change the linens, too."

"This doesn't look like an advertisement, dear," said her mother, picking up the largest and bulkiest of the letters, "It looks like some kind of legal envelope. At least it greatly resembles those which your father uses. It is addressed to you. Carpenter and Carpenter, Attorneys-at-Law, Martinsburg, Ohio, it says in the corner."

"Does it?" Mary Rose looked at the letter with sudden interest. "Why, Mumsey, that's where my dear little old lady lived. I wrote to her when I came home but I never received an answer. But her name wasn't Carpenter. It was Reynolds. Aquila Reynolds. Isn't that odd and old-fashioned? Just like my little old lady herself. I wonder what this is."

She carefully slit the envelope with the paper knife on her living-room desk, and removed the several inclosures. Two of them she dropped into her mother's lap, and the third, a sealed letter, addressed in a spidery hand to "Miss Mary Rose Ensley, Friend-

ville, Ohio," she retained and examined curiously. "A letter within a letter, Mumsey," she said. "Isn't that odd? But this is from my little old lady. See! It says, 'Aquila Reynolds' and—oh, Mumsey, what do you suppose this means? 'To be forwarded only after my death.' " She turned very white and sat down hastily on the nearest chair. "What does it mean, Mumsey?" she repeated, faintly. "Is my dear little old lady dead? And why should this come to me? I don't understand a bit."

"No more do I, darling," said her mother, picking up the legal-looking paper in her lap, and scanning it hastily. "Perhaps this explains."

Then she turned very white in her turn, and laid it down, looking at Mary Rose with such an odd expression that Mary Rose clasped her hands earnestly, saying, "But tell me what it is, Mumsey. Tell me."

"It's a will, my dear," said her mother. "Yes, your little old lady is dead, and this is her will—or a copy of it. It seems that you, for some reason, are the chief legatee. This—" she picked up the other paper,—"is a letter from her lawyer. Shall I read it?"

Mary Rose nodded, too overcome to speak.

"My dear Miss Ensley," read Mrs. Ensley, "It gives me pleasure to inform you that you are chief legatee under the will of my late client, Aquila Reynolds. I enclose a copy of the will, and I shall esteem it a favor if you will come to Martinsburg at your earliest convenience to consult with me regarding the disposal of the real and personal property mentioned therein. I am, dear Miss Ensley, Respectfully and obediently yours, Obadiah Carpenter."

"But why—a legatee? Her property? Oh, Mumsey, I'm too muddled for anything."

"Read the other letter, dear," said her mother, gently.

"I can't." Mary Rose's hands were trembling, "It's all so queer and unexpected. I couldn't read a word. You'll have to read it to me, Mumsey dear."

Mrs. Ensley, sympathizing with her feeling, opened the letter. The writing was faint, and sometimes nearly illegible, but the letter was vigorous and clear. It flowed along, so Mary Rose said afterward, just like the little old lady talked.

"My dear Mary Rose Ensley," ran the letter, "You will be very much surprised to get this letter from me. When it reaches you

I shall have passed, and be standing, I hope, on the banks of the Shining River. I have been expecting to go visiting at my Father's House, for quite a while, and I don't feel a bit bad because the time is near. What I want to tell you is this: When I went down to Kingsport to visit my grand-niece Emmy, I went for two reasons. One was because, like I told you, I hankered to go visiting once more before I died; and the second was because Emmy was my next of kin, and I wanted to look her over and see if she was a fit person to be leaving my all to. Young Doctor Tilton, that was Emory Tilton's oldest boy, told me my days was getting short, and seeing as how I was almost eighty-four I judged he was maybe about right. When Emmy saw fit to be ashamed of me because I was a mite old-fashioned and couldn't talk and act stylish, she didn't have any idea she was cutting off her own nose. No more did you see that you was feathering your nest when you was so sweet and kind to a poor, shabby old woman, that you hadn't never seen before. But Emmy is Emmy, and she won't never be no different, and you are what you are, and probably won't never be no different either. I made up my mind, right then and

there, when you put me on the train at Kingsport, that I was going to change my will when I got to Martinsburg, and I did, before I ever went out home. I went right straight to Obadiah Carpenter and told him what I wanted and he did it right as a trivet. I've left you everything I have, child, except the family silver, the family Bible, and a dollar in currency, which I left to Emmy. The family silver will give her something to brag about, the Bible maybe will teach her a few things she ought to know about the virtue of charity, and the dollar in currency will make my will fast and sound and keep her from breaking it if so be she has a mind to try it. And I got young Doctor Tilton—him I told you about—Henry Weber, the postmaster, and Obadiah Carpenter, to swear that I'm in sound mind, and I'd like to see anybody bust their opinions, for they're the three smartest men in Martinsburg. You see I got a sight more to leave behind me than Emmy or anyone except Obadiah ever suspicioned. My brother Tom run away when he was sixteen, and went up in Alaska. He struck gold up there after prospecting around a while, and before he died of the smallpox he had made a mint of money. His partner promised to lo-

cate me, but it was a good many years before he succeeded in carrying out his trust, because I had married and moved away and the new name and all threw him off. When I got the money I was too old to enjoy it much, or do much with it, though it was considerable of a joy to know I had it and figure what I was going to do with it. It was all invested for me by someone that had more sense than I had about such things, and it's just kept growing, for I've lived simple and had few wants. I was calculating to do something handsome for Emmy when I went down to Kingsport, but her selfishness upset the apple cart for her.

"Now, Mary Rose, I want you should take this money and get a little happiness out of it. I want you, first of all, to get it for yourself, because you deserve it. Then I want you to get it for your own folks, who have made you the sweet thing you are. Then I want you to get it for a lot of folks who won't never have much except what is given to them by somebody else. I'd like to have you get some for some children—lots of little children. I've always loved them, but never had any, and I guess the lack of them made me pretty touchy on the subject. I've always wanted the walls of my house to ring with children's

laughter and voices. I want you to get happiness for some poor overworked mothers that are struggling to make both ends meet. I remember how mine had to struggle for Tom and me, until at last the struggle was too much for her and she died and left us to strangers. I want you to get it for some poor boy or boys like Tom, who died out west all alone with none of his own near him. You are young and strong and honest, and maybe you'll know better how to do this than someone who is older and shrewder. I believe that you will. And last, I want you to get happiness for anybody that needs it, in so far as you can get it. Land knows this world is bleak and sad and lonely enough for lots of folks. And now, God bless you, child. I thought I would get your sweet letter answered, but my time is growing shorter so I fear this is all the reply I shall ever send you. Goodby, and in your charity pray sometimes for the soul of a lonely old woman, whom you knew as—Aquila Reynolds."

Mrs. Ensley laid down the letter and enfolded Mary Rose in her arms. Mary Rose was softly sobbing, "My little old lady! Oh, my poor, dear, little old lady!"

It was Bobby who broke the tension and drove away their tears.

"Hey!" he cried, sticking his head inside the door and looking disgusted as he saw his sister still minus an apron and dissolved in tears. "Why all the rainfall? And where are the cookies? I've been sniffing and smelling, but I don't sniff a thing. Don't you know it's pret' near supper time? I heard the basket factory whistle, and I'm empty as a sieve."

CHAPTER III

ROSE GABLES

"HOW does it feel to be an heiress?" asked Lewis, teasingly.

"I can't realize it yet," said Mary Rose, soberly. "I keep repeating to myself, 'A fourteen-room house, a good barn and other buildings, ten acres of fruit orchards, sixty acres of farm land, and sixty thousand dollars invested in bonds!' I say it over and over but I can't make it mean a thing. I can't believe it happened to me. I'm just like the little old woman who fell asleep by the road and had her petticoats cut all round about. Remember how she said: 'Oh, if this be I, and I think it be, I've a little dog at home and he'll know me?'"

"It's very disheartening," said her cousin Angela, a slim, golden-haired girl of about thirteen, with eyes as blue as June skies, and a face like a Madonna, "very disheartening to travel several hundred miles thinking that your arrival will create a sensation, and

then find when you get there that a legacy has preceded you, and everyone already excited about that."

"Hard luck, I call it, Angel," laughed her Uncle Justin, with whom she was a great favorite, "And the worst of it is not for you, it seems, but for Mary Rose. Now that she has a legacy, she doesn't know what she is going to do with it. One minute she is building an old ladies' home—sort of dropping an anchor for her own old age, you see—and again she is starting a day nursery ——"

"In Friendville?" asked Lewis, with a grin.

"I thought the seminary would improve you, but you get sillier and sillier," said Mary Rose. "Of course not in Friendville, but in some large city near here. There are plenty of them, east and south and west and north."

"Better pick out a place where there is a good opening for young lawyers," suggested Bobby, slyly.

"And for one T. J. Malone in particular, I suppose," said Lewis. "How about it, Posey?"

"Oh, be quiet," said his cousin. "I just wish you had inherited a fortune. You wouldn't think it so funny. I have to use it to make other people happy, you know."

"And yourself, too," said her mother. "You

mustn't make yourself unhappy worrying about it, or you will surely be disobeying the very first request the dear little old lady made of you."

"Well, gee whiz! You can give me some of it," said Bobby, "Not a whole lot, of course. Just enough to buy me ten million marbles, mostly aggies, and a new fishin' rod and bike—or even a Shetland pony will do. If you're just supposed to make people happy, you may as well begin at home with me."

"I wouldn't mind having enough of it to buy me a gallon of ice cream for every meal I eat, and tickets to the World Series until I'm eighty," suggested Jimmie.

"You don't want much, do you?" asked his little sister, Maureen, rather scornfully.

"What would make you happy, Maureen?" asked her Aunt Mary, with a smile for the lively one.

Maureen puckered her pretty brows and thought seriously. "A new dress every day," she said, at last, "and every one of them pink, with lace and ruffles."

"Pink ruffles is all she thinks about," cried Jimmie. "Do you know what, Aunt Mary? I know something crazy, and if she had it, she'd wear it. Guess what."

"I'm a poor guesser, James," said his aunt. "You tell me."

"A raincoat with ruffles," said Jimmie, triumphantly.

"No such thing," said Maureen, with heat, "You're making that up, Jim Merriman. But what if I did? I do think it would be pretty. They could be rubber ruffles. I know something else I'd like, too, Aunt Mary."

"What, dear?"

"Money enough to buy me some new tonsils. Mine are worn out or something, and I'd like to have some unofficial ones."

"Some what?" Mrs. Ensley quieted the simmering laughter with a quick warning glance.

"Unofficial tonsils, that you can take out like Grandpa Wilson takes out his teeth ——"

"Oh!" This time there was no restraining the giggling children, and even the older folks laughed until their sides ached. Maureen's cheeks turned fiery.

"When you get through laughing," she said, indignantly, "I'd be 'bliged if you'll tell me what's funny. I don't think you're p'lite, one bit."

"Maureen!" exclaimed Angela, shocked.

Mrs. Ensley wiped the tears from her eyes,

and slipped a comforting arm about her little niece. "No, we aren't polite, my dear," she said, "not one bit. But we can't help it. You know, Maurie dear, that our dear Lord endowed us with a sense of humor, that's a whole lot like soda water. Sometimes when funny things happen it starts to fizz, and bubbles clear over, and even our politeness won't restrain it. You mean 'artificial,' not 'unofficial' tonsils—and I for one, am curious to know just why you want them."

"Because I suppose they're necessary," said Maureen, slightly mollified, "and the doctor says I have to have mine pulled before I go back to school this Fall."

There was another shout of laughter, but Mr. Ensley, who saw that tears were perilously close to Maureen's eyes, quieted it.

"Pulled, eh?" he said, with a friendly twinkle. "A new operation, indeed. How about you, Fat—and Sweet?" This to Bess, by way of diverting attention from Maureen. "What would make you happy?"

Little Bess smiled back at him confidingly. She was an odd, quiet child, who was apt to say unexpectedly grown-up things.

"Just the sun shining," she said, "makes me happier than anything I know. The birds

sing, and the flowers poke up their heads, and green things get all velvety. It's just like a party outside. Your money won't buy sunshine that lasts all the time, will it, Posey?"

"Indeed, not, darling. And you wouldn't want it to. We have to have cloudy days, too, and rain, to make the green things grow and keep the birds and flowers—yes, and the people, too, from dying of thirst."

"But you are a very wise little girl to find your happiness in something which money can't buy," said Mrs. Ensley, with a fond smile for the baby of her household.

"A wisdom that more of us need to learn," said Lewis.

"I know one boy who has learned it already," said Mr. Ensley, "He is my nephew, and I am very proud of him."

Lewis looked embarrassed, for he knew that his Uncle was referring to him. Two years before Lewis had obeyed the Divine call, "Follow Me," and had gone to the seminary to prepare for the priesthood.

Mr. Ensley pushed back his chair and looked at his watch. "We've a long drive ahead of us, and must be getting started if we are to reach Martinsburg by noon," he said.

"I'm sure I'm ready," said Mary Rose. "I

was ready about three A. M. I couldn't sleep a wink all night because I was so excited, and I had a terrible time holding myself in my room until I heard Mother and Katie stirring. I'll clear the table while the children get their sweaters and hats. Bring down my things, Bobby."

"Mine, too, please," said Angela. "I'll sweep up the crumbs."

At Martinsburg, a few hours later, Mary Rose and her parents went to the office of the lawyer, while the children, in charge of Lewis and Angela, jaunted about the town, looking for places of interest. Then, their talk being concluded, Mr. Carpenter took Mary Rose in his car and drove her over the two pleasant miles of winding country road to the farm which she had inherited, while Mr. Ensley rounded up the children and followed close behind them. On the crest of a hill, the lawyer stopped his car and waited for the others to come up with them. Then he pointed through a clearing to an old-fashioned, rambling house that sat high on the hill to their right.

"That's the Reynolds place," he said.

"The Reynolds place—mine now," thought Mary Rose, feeling a terrifying sense of responsibility because it was now her trust.

"Remember, I've a buyer for it right now if you want to sell," Mr. Carpenter said. "I don't suppose a young girl like you wants to go in for farming, and renters of the class we have around here are not at all dependable. So I suppose you'll want to sell."

"I don't know," Mary Rose had said, when first he told her this. "I haven't seen it yet."

Now here it was. Cherry trees turning to red, phlox and hollyhocks bursting into bloom, bees humming around the hives in the rhubarb-bordered garden, harvest apples mellowing and yellowing on their branches on the big tree by the gate. The house itself, cream-white and beautiful, despite its uncertain architecture, clinging lovingly to the hillside on which, little by little, it had been built. A succession of owners had added to its roominess, and each had embodied his own ideas in the building. Gables here and there and everywhere. An odd, rounded cupola, with a window facing the lane, which somehow reminded Mary Rose of the girl in the fairy tale with her "Sister Anne, Sister Anne, is there anyone coming?" An unexpected French door at the side—the dining room, perhaps. A kitchen that rambled leisurely off to the north. A bedroom or two, perhaps, there in

that wing at the east. A flagstone walk, bordered with sweet lavender, tiger lilies and iris bushes, inviting them to follow it to the quaint entry, where comfortable benches sat alongside and a crimson rambler reared its beauty overhead. A brass knocker awaiting the touch of a hand to arouse those within. But there was no one within—no one at all. The little old lady had been the last of her family, as her husband had been the last of his. There was only "Grand-niece Emmy," and she had been found unworthy of her heritage. So now the old house sat here, alone and lonely, awaiting the coming of new tenants, new friends. Mary Rose might sell it to the young farmer down the road. He had already planted its fields "on shares." But the old house wove a magic spell about the hearts of those who walked its flagstone way. Already Mary Rose was in love with it—and with its orchards, its gardens, its trees, its hominess, its cheeriness. A "white elephant" upon her hands, the lawyer had said. Well, perhaps he was right, and yet ——

"I'm not going to sell it," said Mary Rose aloud. "I *won't* sell it."

She was not talking to the old lawyer now, but to her father. Mr. Carpenter had

gone back to his office, and she stood alone with her father by the long French window, which looked out upon the rhubarb-bordered garden.

"I'm not going to sell it," she said again, by way of emphasis, and the lone hollyhock that reached a third of the way up the window seemed to prick up its ears joyously at the announcement and nod a gay approval.

"But what will you do with it?" asked Mr. Ensley, smiling at her warmth, "No one is going to make you sell it, dear. It's all yours, and you alone may decide what to do with it."

"I don't know what I shall do with it," admitted Mary Rose. "I haven't arrived at that stage in my cogitations. But it's such a darling place, and so much like the little old lady herself that it seems a part of her. It seems that it would be sacrilege to part with it. I think, somehow, I ought to be able to make this place share in my happiness giving. That yard, and that spacious old attic seem made for romping children. The cool, pleasant rooms would spell heaven for some poor, tenement-bound soul. There is everything here for health and happiness—sunshine, air, rest,

peace, beauty. I may keep it, may I not, Daddy?"

"Indeed you may," heartily assented her father.

"There are children in the cities who have never seen grass and trees and flowers except in the city parks," said Mary Rose, planning happily. "I'll bring them here, put color into their pale faces and happiness into their hearts. What a heavenly place to bring them! I shall want a lot of them, though I'll have to content myself with a few at a time. Then I'll need an old lady or two to grandmother them. What is childhood without a grandmother? The grandmothers shall have little white lace caps, and they shall sit on the side verandah and make beautiful patchwork quilts for those old four-posters upstairs."

"And who will cook for the hungry crew?" asked her mother, who had joined them."

"Practical soul!" scolded Mary Rose, "We shall dine on nectar and ambrosia, served by the servants of the gods. Well, of course, if we get *real* hungry, we shall have to have a little cracker-and-cheese. I suppose we shall have to have a mother as well as a grandmother. How could a real home get along

without a real mother? I wonder where I shall find my tenants."

"Don't worry about that. The tenants will come. Later you will be worrying about where you will find room to put all those who wish to come. But, dear daughter," her father laid an affectionate arm across her slender shoulders—shoulders which seemed all too frail for the burden which she was planning to place upon them, "all this will need supervision. Any organization needs a leader. And you are not through college. Do you plan to finish college before you begin work here? What of your education?"

Plans she had planned, and dreams she had dreamed rose up in the mind of Mary Rose. Rose and gold, like the sunset there in the west. To put them all behind her, and take up her work in the world so soon—to forego her days on the campus, college activities, school honors, her degree. To bury youth, and become a woman now—it would take courage and plenty of it. But when she smiled into her father's eyes, her smile was as bright as though no cloud had just passed before her sun.

"College, after all, is only a preparation for the work of life," she said. "When grist comes

to my mill, I suppose God wishes me to do the milling. Perhaps this will not mean giving up college entirely, but only a postponement. But if, in the meantime, I find that living life keeps me busy, and teaches me the things I should know, there will be no great harm to me if I do not go back to school. If I want to be a writer, and you know, that is what I have always dreamed of being, I shall have to do a 'heap o' living' before I write. I tried a short story this year—and the editor sent it back with a lovely note. He said it was very well-written, but that I didn't know anything about the subject on which I wrote. And he was quite right. I didn't. And—well, do you think it is fair to my little old lady just to give her money and not to give myself with it? I can't explain just how I feel about it, but happiness is—oh, isn't it a *personal* thing? I can buy a slums child a new dress, but when the dress wears out, or becomes sleazy and soiled, will the child have happiness? Wouldn't I be doing more for it if I took it on my lap and gave it a holy picture and told it a beautiful story, and made it see that I really loved it? Oh, Daddy, can't you *see* what I'm trying to say? I have to do this myself, college or no college!"

"Yes, I think I understand how you feel," said her father, slowly, while mother pressed her hand to show that she understood, too, "And I believe you are right. At least the experiment will not hurt you."

"Gee, Pose! There's the swellest creek you ever saw down there below that orchard. Great big fishin' holes and great big fish swimming around. Do you suppose it would be too late for me to go fishing today?" Bobby was with them, with Jimmie at his heels.

"I certainly do suppose so. Don't you see the sun is low? Where are the others?"

"Dunno. I heard Maureen yelling bloody murder down by the barn a while ago," said Jimmie, "Girls are always yelling, so I didn't go see what was the matter. Maureen yells more than most of them. I suppose she saw a worm or a bug or something."

"Gracious! She may be hurt or something." Mary Rose started hastily toward the barn, while her parents followed at a more leisurely pace.

"Maureen! Maurie, honey, where are you?" Mary Rose paused at the barn entry until her eyes should accustom themselves to the dimness of the interior.

There was a rustle overhead and a

smothered sound, which might have been either a giggle or a sob, or even a movement of pigeons in the loft, but there was no response.

"Maureen," said Mary Rose, sternly, "Answer me."

"We're right here, Posey," said a still, small voice overhead, the voice of Bess.

Straining her eyes overhead, Mary Rose espied them, Maureen and Bess. Her heart arose in her throat at the peril of their position, for they were perched high on a beam, at least thirty feet above the floor of the barn.

"What are you doing up there?" demanded Mary Rose, "Why don't you come down?"

"We can't," explained Maureen, "Bess is fast."

"What?"

"Fast. She's caught on a nail. She was walking the plank ——"

"It was a pirut ship," said Bess.

"I thought of it," said Maureen, proudly, "It's a game, you know. Piruts. You wear red neckerchiefs and carry daggers. Bess was a captive and I made her walk the plank."

"She was going to dab me with a stagger," quavered Bess, almost weeping.

"To stab her with a dagger, she means," giggled Maureen, "If she didn't do it."

"And then I fell," said Bess.

"She went and let herself get nervous," said Maureen, with a great contempt for so weak a person, "And I guess she slipped off. I yelled like anything, and she caught on a nail, and hung on with her arms, too. And then I came and pulled and pulled until I got her back up like this—but if I come down she'll fall, and she can't come down because she is still caught on the nail. She's afraid to let go of me. She's an awful baby."

Mary Rose felt weak in the knees. If Bess had fallen all the way!

"I should have sold the farm to Meacham tomorrow," she said, "I couldn't have stood the place. Don't dare to move an inch!" This last to the children, "I'm going after Daddy ——"

"Daddy's right here," said Mr. Ensley, behind her, "Hold tight, you young mischiefs. I'm coming."

The rescue effected, they returned slowly to the house. Here Mary Rose locked the doors and closed the windows, while Jimmie went to the far corner of the orchard to find Lewis

and Angela and apprise them of the fact that it was time to start back to Friendville.

"Stop, please, Daddy," said Mary Rose, as he turned their car into the roadway from the farm lane, "Let's give my happiness farm a name. You can all help. Everyone suggest something."

"Cherry Hill," said Jimmie, whose stomach was so filled with cherries that he could think of nothing else.

"That's pretty," said Mary Rose, "Your turn, Bobby."

"Fish Farm," suggested Bobby, "That fishin' hole ——"

"Won't appeal to my old ladies," said Mary Rose, with a smile, "You're out, Bob. Angela?"

"Bluebird Farm, or Bluebird Hill," said Angela, "Because the bluebird is a symbol of happiness."

"Good! Lewis?"

"Posey's Post," suggested Lewis, gravely.

"Silly! Mumsey, won't you suggest something?"

"Rest Haven," said her mother.

"That's lovely. Daddy?"

Her father shook his head. "I'll let the rest of you do the suggesting," he said, "I

use my head too much at my office. Unless—would you consider calling it Merry Mary's Garden?"

"Daddy! You're as bad as Lewis! Maureen?"

"The Pirut's Ship," said Maureen.

"Indeed, and we've had enough of pirates," said Mary Rose, "You're out, too, honey. Bess, what do you want to call it?"

The littlest girl was standing up in her seat, looking at the old house with eager eyes. "I sink I know—" she began. Bess still lapsed into baby expressions.

"Sink!" cried Bobby, derisively, "Sink! Sink! Say think."

"Be quiet, Bob. Let her alone. What is it, honey?"

"Those funny little things on the house—what are they?"

"Gables, darling."

"Yes, the gables. See how pretty and rosy from the sun. And the house belongs to Mary Rose, and there are roses in the yard—heaps and heaps of roses. Why don't you call it Rose Gables?"

"Why, honey, that's beautiful! Don't you like it, Mumsey?"

"Beautiful—and appropriate in more ways

than one," said Mrs. Ensley, "Because it will probably bring rose-color into many a drab life, if our Posey carries out her plans. Rose is the color of happiness."

"Rose Gables. All in favor say 'Aye,'" said Mary Rose.

The ayes had it—and thus Mary Rose's happiness farm was named.

CHAPTER IV

FOUR FOR THE GABLES

MRS. MILTON looked with distaste upon the three children across the aisle. They were very dirty, very ragged, very sticky. The largest, a boy, had a shock of black hair which looked as though it had never made the acquaintance of either water or comb. The older girl, who was of uncertain age, perhaps ten and tall, perhaps fourteen and small, was unkempt of head, too, but she knew well how to wield a ten-cent curling iron, as her much-frizzed locks shouted to the world. Her face was not clean, but it was well-powdered, and her cheeks were crimson with a terrible, ten-cent-store crimson. Her voice was shrill and shrewish, and she spent much of her time shouting at the youngest child. And the youngest child was the most terrible of all. She wore a pink, draggled skirt, intended for a much older girl, and a faded blue middy blouse, from which one sleeve had been ripped. Old tennis shoes failed to conceal her feet, be-

cause they boasted at least two dozen holes betwixt the pair of them, and she wore but one sock. In some far day this sock had been silk and white, but now no words could describe it. She had a package of all-day suckers, a seemingly inexhaustible package which had been bestowed on her at parting by the nice-looking young man who had placed this outlandish trio on the train. Mrs. Milton had speculated long upon the connection of this young man with these youngsters, and had finally given up the problem. The terrible infant munched steadily upon these suckers, varying the performance only by trips to the water cooler after drinks. She dragged her feet up the aisle, and gaped impudently at the other passengers as she passed them. Once, inspired, no doubt, by the frank expression of disgust on the face of Mrs. Milton, she stuck out her tongue at that lady, and flourished the sucker she was chewing under that lady's very nose.

"Yaw, yaw, yaw, ol' Smarty," she gibed, "Donchu wish you had a bite, donchu?"

The three wrangled among themselves.

"Did, too!"

"Did not!"

"Aw, shut up!"

"Go soak your head!"

Once, quite fluently, and with the ease of long practice, the boy swore a mighty oath, that shocked the ears that heard it. The conductor came and spoke to him with vigor, and he turned sullen, and was silent the remainder of the trip, looking out the window and chewing a grimy thumb reflectively. Oh, decidedly, these were terrible children.

Mrs. Milton did not care particularly for any kind of children. If she had a preference, it was for prim little girls who combed their hair slickly and said "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am," as she herself had been taught in the days of samplers and wall mottoes. Little girls who always used clean handkerchiefs, and never by any chance had stockings that sagged or had holes in them. She devoutly hoped that these children were going to some institution where they would be given hot baths, and would have their manners and their morals cleaned along with their bodies. She hoped their ultimate destination would be far from her range of vision. Just now she wanted to move away from them, and she waited for a seat to be vacated at the far end of the car. She waited in vain, and finally decided that she must resign herself to her place. She tried

to put these children out of her mind, and she turned her attention to the letter which she took from her purse—the letter which had absorbed all her thoughts during all her waking moments since she had received it—the letter that had to do with her trip on this train.

The letter had come as a godsend just when she, Matilda Milton, of genteel lineage, was about to be cast, bag and baggage, into the streets, because she could not pay her room rent. She read it now, with a half-smile of contentment on her sharp, angular features.

"My dear Mrs. Milton: I was much interested in your reply to my advertisement, and think you are just the kind of person whom I need to fill this position at Rose Gables. You are to be—and until you know more of Rose Gables, this will seem odd to you—the grandmother of our family. You will have the 'family' darning and mending to do, and, when you feel able, a little very light housework, such as dusting, picking flowers for the living rooms, etc. You may occasionally be called upon to act as chaperon for the younger members of the family on picnics and other outings to which I am not able to accompany them. When you are not well, nothing will be asked of you. You are not to con-

sider yourself a servant, but a member of our Rose Gables family. Kindly let me know by what train to expect you and you will be met at the train by someone from the Gables. Trusting that you will soon find it convenient to come to us, I am, my dear Mrs. Milton, Cordially and sincerely yours, Mary Rose Ensley."

"Peculiar," said Mrs. Milton, for perhaps the dozenth time since she had received the letter, "Peculiar, but most fortunate and timely for me. Any port is acceptable in a storm. Doubtless this Mrs. Ensley is the wealthy mother of a large family, and Rose Gables is their summer home. But how oddly she advertised, and how oddly she writes."

The advertisement which Mrs. Milton had answered read as follows:

"Wanted: For mending and light house work in farm house, respectable, elderly woman, widow preferred, who has been without employment for some time and is sorely in need of a position. Please write M. R. Ensley, Rose Gables, Martinsburg, Ohio."

Mrs. Milton had been greatly excited as she penned her reply. She was all that the ad called for, respectable, elderly, widowed, and oh, how badly in need of a position! She would

go anywhere—*anywhere*. She was at the end of her resources. And the very last cent of her slender savings had gone to purchase her ticket to Martinsburg.

The train stopped at a little wayside station. A passenger got off. Two more boarded the train. There was the usual slamming and banging of doors. Then the brakeman came through the car, shouting.

"The next station stop is Martinsburg—Martinsburg."

Although the day was sweltering, Matilda Milton took down her carefully-folded coat from the rack above her head, and put it on. Then she put on her black silk gloves, for she had been reared in a school which taught that no lady is properly dressed without gloves. She moved her valise where it would be easily accessible. Then she sat up stiffly and waited.

"Pipe the old bird putting on the duds. She must be having a chill," came in a very audible whisper from across the aisle.

"Shut up, Callie, and get ready to get off," said the older girl. "Didn't you hear that guy say Martinsburg?"

Mrs. Milton shuddered fastidiously. The three imps were getting off at Martinsburg, too.

Martinsburg appeared. A thin scattering of houses, then a huddle of them. Small, snug, respectable houses, such as are found in every small town. Then, with a whir and a rush, the train passed over Main Street, with its postoffice and business houses. Then the ugly red depot, with its ugly red satellites of tool sheds and freight houses. Mrs. Milton got off the train. So, too, did the three imps. The youngest crowded past her, clambering over her feet, and nearly knocking the valise from her hand, wholly unheeding of the older girl, shrilling after her, "Call-ee-ee! You just wait, you'll ketch it! Call-ee-ee!" and the boy mumbling, "Aw, shut up! Let 'er go." But now Mrs. Milton forgot them, for she had interests of her own. She was looking for her employer. She pictured her, a tall, distinguished, graying woman, fashionably garbed —but she could not see her. There was a short, stout woman—but no—she was getting on the train. There was a bustling, thin little body in an absurdly large hat—but she had come to meet her husband, who was large, and slow and jovial. There was a young girl, with a pretty face, who wore a blue dress with a white collar, and swung a jaunty straw hat by its brim, leaving the wind free to ruffle her

lustrous brown hair. She was looking toward her, and smiling. Yes, she was coming toward her, holding out a cordial, sun-browned hand.

"Mrs. Milton, isn't it? I'm so glad you came. This is my car over here. I'll take your bag. Will you just go over and get in, please. I'm meeting some children, too. Oh, here they are!" Mary Rose masked her dismay at the appearance of the trio, under a bright smile. "Is this Helen Clark? And Frederick and Callie? How nice of you to come and visit me this summer!"

"Applesauce!" said Callie.

Mary Rose laughed. "Perhaps," she said, "Anyhow, kiddies, over here is the car, and you just hop in. It's nearly supper time at the Gables, and Lizzie will never forget us if we aren't on time. I'm sure she's having hot biscuits—and honey. Sound good?"

They obeyed her injunction, the boy still sullen, the girl affecting a languid ease she did not feel, and Callie still voluble.

"Gee!" she said, "You're just a kid! That Malone guy made us believe you was an old dame like this'n here ——"

"Sh," Mary Rose laid cool fingers across the child's lips, "You must be polite, Callie. This is Mrs. Milton, who is going to live at

Rose Gables. Will you sit in front with me, Mrs. Milton?"

Matilda Milton stood with lips pursed in a thin, disapproving line, and feet planted on the station platform as firmly as is anchored the Rock of Gilbraltar.

"Not a step do I budge with those heathenish young animals," she said, firmly, "I don't wonder you need help if you have a parcel of imps like these around. Where's your mother, young woman? Why didn't she come to meet me personally?"

"My mother?" Mary Rose looked blank, "Why, Mumsey isn't here. She's at home in Friendville. She spent a couple of weeks with me, helping me to get things straightened, but now there's just Lewis and I and my friend Bride—and Lizzie Wickham and the children. Mother had to go home."

"And leave a child like you to run things?" asked Mrs. Milton, with even more disapproval.

Mary Rose's laughter tinkled suddenly. "Oh, I see," she said, "You thought Mary Rose Ensley was older—my mother. Oh, no, Mrs. Milton, I am Mary Rose Ensley myself. I am the proprietor, I suppose you would call

it—Mumsey calls me the 'little mother' of Rose Gables."

"Well!" Mrs. Milton was quite stunned by this new revelation. Then she rallied, and spoke her mind.

"I'm sorry, young woman, but I'm not going a step with you and these young persons. I shall take the next train back to the city." For a second Mrs. Milton forgot that she had spent her last cent for railroad fare and was practically penniless.

Mary Rose's gray eyes clouded. "I'm sorry," she said, slowly, "I hoped you would like it here. We—I fixed you a lovely room, with the prettiest view we have—and I've been planning—well—" her face brightened, "You'll just have to go home with me tonight, anyway. There isn't another train until morning."

"She kin set in the station all night," piped Callie, with a venomous glance at the old woman who had called her a "young person" and a "heathenish child," and who so palpably preferred her room to her company, "It's good enough for her kind and I hopes the rats eat her—Ouch!" as a ringing slap from the palm of her sister's hand cut short her tirade, "You ——!" She turned upon the older girl with a

string of vituperation that caused Mary Rose to turn pale.

With a single swift movement Mary Rose swept the child's slight figure into her arms and put her hand over her mouth. "If there is any more of this performance I know a young lady who will spend the night in the station," she said, firmly. "I forbid you to speak again, Callie—and you will stop your crying at once." She set her firmly onto the back seat and then turned to Mrs. Milton with dignity. "Are you coming, Mrs. Milton?" she asked, "Because we have no more time to waste. We make it a rule at Rose Gables to be on time for meals."

"I suppose I have to come," conceded Mrs. Milton, who had suddenly recollected the empty state of her purse, "I have no desire to spend a night in the station, and since I have travelled this distance, I am entitled to lodging and supper, but little did I ever think I should be compelled to ride in such company."

Mary Rose was silent. She placed the bag in the luggage carrier and climbed into her place behind the wheel. She shot the car forward with disconcerting speed, and not one word did she speak all the way to Rose Gables. There was a white line about her red lips and a deep shadow in her eyes that betokened what

her father was wont to call, "A storm at sea." The anger in her bosom was three-fold. Anger at Mrs. Milton, with her too genteel gentility, which did not concern itself with common politeness. Anger at the child Callie, with her uncouth manners, at the sister, who slapped her, and the brother, whose derisive grin was somehow more insulting than the younger child's impudence. Above all, anger at Tim Malone, who had garnered these three terrible youngsters from Heaven knew where and shipped them off to her with only a telegram of warning: "Sending on afternoon train three Clark children, Helen, Frederick, Callie—fit subjects for happiness project. Good luck. Tim." She had wanted poor children, unhappy children, homeless children, but not children such as these, who had clearly sprung up in the slums and gutters and were fit subjects for the reformatory. How could she let Maureen and Bess play with a child like Callie? How place Angela, with her gentle goodness, in close association with the too sophisticated Helen? How entrust Jimmie and Bobby to a boy like this Frederick? Oh, of what was Tim thinking?

The ride to the Gables was made in record time and it was a girl with nerves strained

almost to the breaking point who slipped from her place at the wheel of the car and turned the machine over to Lewis, who waited at the gate with the other children.

"Take it to the garage, please, Lew," she said, "Come, children. Angela, please take the girls to wash and then bring them to the dining room. Frederick ——"

"Aw, chuck it," growled the boy, surlily. "My name's Fritz."

"I'll take care of him," said Lewis, looking curiously at his cousin's white face. "Come on, you Fritz-fellow. Show you where we keep the bus."

Fritz glowered, hesitated, looked into Lewis' winning eyes, and was lost. "Right," he mumbled, and climbed into the front seat with the older boy, while Jim and Bobby clambered hilariously into the rear for a ride around to the garage.

"What is this?" asked Mrs. Milton, suddenly "An orphanage?"

"No, indeed." Mary Rose was "praying down" her temper, as Sister Imelda had taught her in the old days at the convent, praying it down with quick, silent, impassioned appeals to her Angel Guardian—"Oh, guard my tongue! Oh, seal my lips! Oh, help me to

keep sweet!" Now she smiled valiantly. "This is far from being an orphanage, Mrs. Milton. We call it a happiness farm. If you stay long enough you will learn why we call it so. The children you see here now, are only visiting. Angela and the little fat boy Jimmie, and Lewis, the young man who took the car for me, are my cousins. They will leave before school begins. So will Bobby, the other little boy. He is my brother. I have a little sister, too, and another little cousin, Maureen, but they went back to Friendville with Mumsey and Daddy. They will probably be here for dinner Sunday, and then you will meet my parents."

"Humph! I hope I'll not be here Sunday," said Mrs. Milton, acidly. "Will you please show me to my room and serve my supper there? I couldn't eat a bite at the same table with those—those creatures who came out here with us."

Mary Rose conducted her silently upstairs and ushered her into the cool, pretty bedroom which she had selected for this grandmother of her family. How different was she from the kind old lady whom she had pictured occupying it! She took the old lady's wraps, and hung them in the roomy old closet, lowered

the shade so that the glare of the setting sun would not hurt her eyes, brought her a pitcher of water from the bathroom in the hall, and then went downstairs to prepare her tray. Bride, who was in the kitchen helping the housekeeper, smiled at her sympathetically.

"Tired, honey?" she asked.

"No," said Mary Rose, shortly, "I'm just out of sorts. Oh, Bride." She winked to keep back the tears that threatened to break forth, "They—they're terrible! You can't imagine how terrible they are."

"The children, honey?" asked Bride, anxiously.

"Oh, yes," Mary Rose sighed. "And the grandmother. I almost believe the grandmother is the worst of all. She won't have anything to do with them and says she won't stay—and she has to have her supper in her room—and that girl Helen uses paint and wears high-heeled shoes, all run over, of course and the boy looks as though he swears and steals and chews tobacco—and the little one is a—a monstrosity—a—a—Oh! I'll never forgive that Tim for sending them out here—never!"

"Callie's sick," said Angela, coming in hastily, "oh, miserably sick. It's her stomach.

Helen says it's suckers. She says she ate almost two dozen suckers——"

"Two dozen! But where——"

"Oh, Tim bought them. I guess she asked for them. She hadn't had any dinner, you see——"

"Angela! Riding all this way——"

"Helen says they never eat but two meals a day—sometimes only one. She says their old man—I think she means her father—says kids eat too much, anyway. She says he licks them and drinks up the money. She says she is used to it, but Callie is often sick like this——"

"Oh, the poor darling," cried Mary Rose, forgetting that she had just called the same child a 'monstrosity,' "Oh, the poor baby! Just think of being hungry, Bride! A poor little girl being so hungry! No wonder she's a bag of bones. Oh, I'm glad Tim sent her. We'll feed her eggs and milk and spinach——"

"And vitamins and calories," said Bride, with a smile, "I thought you wouldn't forgive Tim for sending them?"

"Sh! Don't mention it. That was the evil one talking for me. That was never I. I'll take her up some soda to settle her tummy,

and then we'll feed her a little chicken broth. Think of that crazy Tim feeding her two dozen suckers! Bride, won't you fix up a tray for Mrs. Milton? She looks so tired and white. Make it pretty and tempting and put a little bunch of sweet peas on it for her. We'll be so sweet to her that she just can't bear to leave us."

CHAPTER V

A HANDY MAN

IT WAS less than two months since Mary Rose and her helpers had finished renovating and making over the old house in order that it might fill the rôle for which it was destined. Less than two months since Mumsey had kissed her and gone back to Friendville, leaving her alone to manage as best she might. Less than two months, but in that time Mary Rose had learned much of human nature.

Together she and her father, mother, and Obadiah Carpenter, who proved himself an invaluable friend once she succeeded in convincing him that she was not crazy to keep Rose Gables, had planned for the success of her farm. They had planned to make it self-supporting, in-so-far as this was possible. They had planned to make the interest from the invested capital cover all expenses, ordinary and extraordinary, which could not be covered by the produce of the farm itself.

"You must not *give* charity, Mary Rose,"

said her father, when this was discussed, "For giving that asks nothing makes more beggars. Help to the deserving, deserves help in return. Even the children who come to Rose Gables can be made to feel that they are of value in the management of the place, that their advice is worth while, and that their aid is indispensable. Each can do his or her share to earn. There will be a vast amount of work to be done in a place the size of Rose Gables. This year you will not have to bother about the major farm crops, because young Meacham already has the place planted. Another year it would be well for you to have your own farmer on the place. One whom you pay a salary, so that all the produce from the farm goes back to the farm. But even this year there is much left for you to look after. The bees, the cows, the chickens, the hogs, the fruit, and the garden—all these must be looked after. The house and the lawn must be cared for. You can not begin to do this yourself. If your family is large you will have about all you can do just to act as overseer, do the book-keeping, and buying, plan the disposal of your produce, and maintain discipline among the younger members of your family. I am afraid that even this much is a great deal for

a young girl to tackle—but you are sensible and efficient ——"

"Thank you, kind sir," said Mary Rose.

Her father tweaked her ear. "Lizzie in the kitchen will be a great help. I know that you will all be properly fed, for Lizzie's cooking is something to remember. You could dispose of the bees and part of the chickens ——"

"Oh, no!" said Mary Rose, "they will add so much to our income."

"True. But you don't know much about caring for them. I'll send you out some books on poultry and bee culture, and you will have to learn all you can about them. Meacham will give you advice when you need to ask it. He is a good neighbor. After all, it is experience that teaches us most. You learn how to feed chickens by feeding them and how to hive bees by hiving them. Personally I'd like to see the bee I'd hive. I'm afraid of them, and the little scamps know it. You'll need a good handy man. Know of anyone who will do, Carpenter?"

"Lot of 'em around, but none of 'em amount to much," confessed that gentleman, rubbing his bald spot, thoughtfully, "Lot of hoboes passing through in the summer time anxious

to pick up short jobs. Sometimes you can pick up a pretty good hand that way."

"Risky business," said Mr. Ensley. "Well, we'll find you someone, Posey, and perhaps you can get a good, steady man by inserting an ad in some of the larger town papers. A man and his wife would be good—some one who needs the work badly, and would appreciate a good home."

Mary Rose had had *three* handy men since that conversation.

"I don't know why they call them 'handy' men," she complained tragically to Lewis, after the third of the species had shaken the dust of Rose Gables from his feet and departed into the unknown. "If they're handy, I'm crazy. I think I shall be crazy if I get any more like them. I don't know what I'll do without you, Lewis. Fine vacation you've had! You've milked cows, struggled with setting hens, picked berries, picked cherries, handled the bees ——"

"Hasn't hurt me any," said Lewis, loyally, "I'm hard as nails and brown as a berry. So are you, Pose. Typical farmerette, aren't you? Wish I didn't have to go back to school next week and leave you to cope with this alone. Of course you'll have Fritz."

"Thank goodness!" said Mary Rose, fervently, "Fritz is a jewel. But he will be going to school, too. I suppose I'll have to advertise for another handy man. Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

It was true that Fritz had changed for the better. This, too, Mary Rose owed to the influence of Lewis. Under his magic leadership, the younger boy had lost his sullenness and hang-dog air. Once divested of his grime, and clothed in decent clothes, he was a surprisingly good-looking lad, and in less than a fortnight after his arrival, he was a surprisingly well-behaved one. Once he had used rough language, but Lewis had promptly taken him in hand. Mary Rose had never known what Lewis said to him, but the boy's offense had never been repeated. Helen, too, was a different child. With her face and hair well-washed, and freed, the one of its make-up, the other of its dismaying frizzes, she, too, was found to be rather pretty and attractive. Her cheap dress and high-heeled shoes had speedily found their way to the rubbish pile, and she now wore low-heeled, sensible shoes, and pretty embroidered ginghams. Her manners were harder to tone than her brother's, but consciously or unconsciously, she was fall-

ing into Angela's gentle mannerisms and way of speech, and the two girls, so different in disposition and training, were becoming fast friends. Of the three Clarks, it was Callie who remained a thorn in the side of Mary Rose. Callie, clean of dress and body, with soft roundings of flesh beginning to cover her poor little bones, was still Callie, the impudent and uncouth, who mocked at everything and everybody and knew not the meaning of obedience. Mary Rose was still being patient with her and praying that some miracle would happen to transform Callie.

"I'm sure," she often thought, "that there is something fine in the child somewhere. I shall leave her in the hands of the Blessed Mother."

"Is the Rose Gables mother anywhere about?"

This was the Saturday after Lewis, Angela, and the children had gone back to school, and Mary Rose was in her office, laboring over the month's bills. She had been so busy that she had not heard the entrance of the newcomer, who had been unceremoniously directed to the Gables office by no less a person than Callie herself. Even though the Gables lay off the beaten track, there were innumerable callers

and they were of all kinds. They included passing tourists, who drove up the lane to see if they could find any antique furniture, or cold buttermilk, or vegetables, or chickens, or fresh eggs, or home-made bread, or a night's lodging, or any of the other things tourists are in the habit of wanting; neighbors, who lived perhaps three or four miles away, and made mildly or avidly curious calls on "that young thing Quilly Reynolds left her property to. Running an experiment farm of some kind. Raising quite a crop, mostly stray kids and queer old women;" agents—agents for incubators and brooders, knowledge books, cheap hardware, farm machinery, magazines, silos, correspondence school courses; derelicts, of one kind and another, looking for anything from a "hand-out" to a sizeable loan, or a haven at the happiness farm, rumors of which had reached the outside world in even this short time; and reporters and magazine article writers, looking for material. Mary Rose patiently interviewed them all, realizing that this was one of the penalties of her house by the side of the road. She was even soft-hearted enough to wish that she could give to each and every one of them all the things that he or she sought. Now she lifted a preoc-

cupied face to greet this caller, the while she attempted to make a mental classification of him. She saw that he was a young man of her own age, or a little older, not too well-dressed, but not shabby either. He had a pleasant face, and an engaging smile, but there was a harassed look about his eyes that showed he was not entirely happy, and he was thin to the point of emaciation. She could not classify him. Tourist, derelict, agent or reporter—none of these seemed to fit. She smiled at his odd query.

"I am Miss Ensley," she said, pleasantly, "I am the 'mother' of Rose Gables."

"I beg your pardon," the stranger flushed painfully and twisted his cap between nervous fingers, "You looked so young ——"

"A fault that time speedily remedies—all too speedily." She laughed at his discomfiture. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"I—well, you see—" he stammered and hesitated, "I understood—that is, I thought you might be in need of some extra help."

"I am," said Mary Rose, in surprise. He did not look like a farm hand. His white hands had never handled hoe or plow, she felt sure.

"I'd like a chance to work for you," he said.

"What experience have you had?" asked Mary Rose, now most business-like.

"That's the trouble," he smiled, ruefully, "I haven't had any. The nearest I ever got to a cow was across the counter in a butcher shop and the same with chickens. But I'm certainly the most willing hand you ever hired, Miss Ensley."

"I haven't hired you yet," said Mary Rose, looking puzzled, "What under the sun makes you think you can be a handy man?"

"Dire necessity," he confessed, "I'm not well—nothing serious. Just a sort of nervous break-down. Doctor told me to get back to Nature and all that. I saw a little article about Rose Gables in the Kingsport Times. It told about your inheritance, and the purpose for which it was to be used—and I thought maybe you'd take in another poor down-and-outer."

Mary Rose looked thoughtful. No experience at all was a poor recommendation. But then the last man had been "experienced," and his efficiency had been a joke. The man before him had been "experienced," and insolent to the *nth* degree. The first "handy

man" had been experienced, and had started his brief career at the Gables by over-stuffing her best milch cow with green corn, with fatal results. While she thought, the stranger swayed a little on his feet, and saved himself from falling by clutching at her desk. She gave him a startled glance and saw that his face was deathly pale. Sudden comprehension came to her. The man was starving.

"You are ill," she said, "Sit down. You walked out here from the station?"

He nodded. He did not think it necessary to tell her that he arrived at the station via the box-car route, but somehow she knew.

"How long have you been ill?"

"Two months since I worked. Went all to pieces at my desk. Had a long siege of typhoid last year that used up all my savings, and paved the way for this let-down." He arose unsteadily. "I'm sorry I bothered you, Miss Ensley. I didn't realize—of course you can't use a sick man. I'll be moving on. Thank you for your consideration."

Mary Rose made a movement of dissent. "Sit down, boy. You're staying for supper, anyway. It's an unwritten law at the Gables that all guests stay for a meal. You must be famished now. I'll bring you in some sand-

wiches and a glass of milk. Lizzie, our housekeeper, always has a stock of both on hand for our hungry brood."

He started to protest, but she was gone. In a minute she was back again, bearing a generous plate of brown-bread and lettuce sandwiches, and two glasses of milk.

"I'm hungry, too," she confessed, "I can do housework all day and not be hungry, but let me be book-keeping for two or three hours and I'm ravenous. It must take more food for my brain than for my muscles."

He understood her sweet tactfulness and was duly grateful. She moved a small table to the cool of the window-opening, and together they ate the lunch she had brought. Mary Rose talked of this and that, and watched him as she talked. Her heart ached with pity for him. He was hungry—very, very hungry—and he was so pitifully afraid she would guess how hungry he was. She guessed what an effort it must be for him to eat like a gentleman when he was as hungry as a half-starved puppy. He talked a little, too. He was an accountant, working in the office of a large automobile factory. His name was Alois Shaffer. He was a Catholic, too. He had no real home—just boarded.

His father had died when he was quite small, his mother a few years later. He had been an only child. He had no one except ——

"There's a girl," he confessed, shyly, "She used to room at the same boarding house. She worked in a laundry. She used to come home fagged out with the heat and the hard work. I thought a lot of her, and I planned to take her out of that. Then I got sick—and a sick man without a job hasn't any right to ask a girl to share his misery. I couldn't even buy a clean collar for the wedding now. She ——"

A series of wild shrieks coming from the upper part of the house interrupted his confidence. Mary Rose started to her feet with a blanching face. She hurried in the direction of the disturbance and the young man followed. The shrieks came nearer as they approached the stairs. Half-way up the flight a distracted apparition met them. Mrs. Milton, wild-eyed, and with her white hair flying about her face, threw herself upon Mary Rose, shrieking, "Save me! Save me!"

"What is it?" cried Mary Rose.

"A wild animal. A terrible wild animal. In my bureau drawer. That Callie took it up there—I know she did. I saw her sneaking down stairs, and she stuck out her tongue

at me, as she always does. I knew she'd been into mischief, but little did I think ——"

"Take care of her," said young Shaffer, "I'll manage the wild animal."

Mary Rose gave him a grateful look. "It's the first room at the front of the hall," she said.

Her heart was heavy within her as she tried to soothe the frightened old woman. Callie was getting worse instead of better. She made no secret of her animosity toward Mrs. Milton, and never lost an opportunity of tormenting her. No use talking to her of the respect due to age. It was really Mrs. Milton's own fault, Mary Rose knew. She had never been civil to the child. Since that first day, when they had arrived together and she had refused to eat at the same table with them, she had treated the three children with the bitterest contempt.

Alois Shaffer came back down the stairs carrying an odd-looking object.

"I've never seen one in life," he assured them, "But I've seen them in cartoons along about the second of February. It's our old friend, Mr. Groundhog, called 'woodchuck' for short. He's quite dead. In fact, I think

he has been dead for several days. He seems to be—er—in the throes of decomposition."

"Ugh! Dead or alive, it's a terrible thing to find in my bureau drawer," sobbed Mrs. Milton. "It's no use, Miss Ensley. Either that child has to go or I go. How can you put up with her?"

"You can hardly expect her to like you, Mrs. Milton," said Mary Rose, gently. "Of course I can't condone such naughty tricks, but it will take time to change Callie. Helen and Fritz are getting to be lovely children."

"Humph! I know you always side with her," said Mrs. Milton, icily. "I'm only sorry that I ever came here. I'm sure I don't know how much longer I'll be staying," and she sailed upstairs with much greater dignity than that with which she had come down.

Mary Rose smiled apologetically at Alois Shaffer, who had deposited the "wild animal" outside and returned. "You see a happiness farm has its ups and downs," she said.

"Jove, yes!" exclaimed that young man, fervently. "You couldn't pour happiness down a dame like that one with a funnel, could you? That Callie must be a clipper. Do you think the old lady will really leave?"

"No, indeed," said Lizzie, who had come in

from the kitchen in the midst of the hulla-balloo. "You couldn't chase that one away with a shotgun. She's been leaving ever since she came, but she has too soft a berth. She'll never go as long as her three meals a day are going upstairs regularly."

"I think you're hired," said Mary Rose, when they had returned to their interrupted lunch a few minutes later. "You may not know much about cows and chickens, but you're extraordinarily handy when it comes to wild animals. So long as Callie stays we never know when we will have an emergency—and it's two miles to civilization and the police and fire departments. Yes, you're hired."

"Thank you," said Shaffer, with a grin of fellowship. "Thank you—and Callie."

"And about that girl," she added, as an after thought, "now that the children are going to school, and I have three more in my family—a Mrs. Pebbles, the widowed mother of two children, who has suffered an injury to her back, is coming tomorrow to stay until she is entirely recovered—I'm greatly in need of some extra help with the housework. If you care to go back to Kingsport in a week or two and see her for me, I'll be glad to pay your expenses, and furnish the wedding,

too. Lizzie Wickham can bake the finest wedding cake you ever ate ——"

"What are you—an angel?" asked the new hand in a husky voice, "I—I can't thank you —now—but I'll see that you aren't sorry, and I—say, will you lend me a sheet of paper, and a stamped envelope, I can't wait—I have to write a letter."

Mary Rose shoved the bills aside, and gave him her desk and the stationery he needed, and then she went away and left him to his exceedingly pleasant task.

"Set an extra plate for supper, Lizzie," she reported in the kitchen, "I just hired a new 'handy man,' and I think that this one has come to stay."

CHAPTER VI

CALLIE GETS A GRANDMOTHER

"YOU'RE a norphan," said Elizabeth Ann.

"You're a liar," said Callie, shrilly.

The third grade stopped their play and listened—listened and looked. This began to sound interesting.

Elizabeth Ann tossed her golden ringlets in disdain.

"Ladies don't call each other liars," she said, "You're not a lady. My mother says you're a vulgar child. I'm going to have a birthday party next week, and you won't be invited. We'll have little, teensy baskets with nuts and candy in them, and wear paper caps and snap for fortunes ——"

"You're another liar," said Callie, "Ladies do so call liars. I'm callin' *you* one—hear me? One liar, two liars, three liars! Smarty, smarty, smarty, going to have a party! Nobody's coming but ——"

"Is that so? The best people in town will

be there," said Elizabeth Ann, with conscious superiority, "I'm going to have a green silk dress for it, because Mother says I look beautiful in green, with my golden hair. And I'm going to play my new piece on the pee-ano. There won't be no norphans there at all, nor other people with ex-crushating manners—like you ——"

Smack! Smack! Callie's right hand smote Elizabeth Ann on the right cheek, and her left hand left a smart imprint on the left cheek. Then a veritable battery of blows rained upon the tender person of Elizabeth Ann. Callie fought like all the furies, knowing neither law nor reason. She kicked, she bit, she scratched, she clawed. Elizabeth Ann, whose ability to fight lay only in her biting tongue, shielded her body from the onslaught as best she might, and screamed, while the third grade stood by and howled with glee.

"Callista Clark!" An avenging angel, in the person of the third grade teacher, swooped down upon the termagant Callie, and an ungentle hand snatched her from the fray. "Go into your schoolroom and take your seat at once. Such disgraceful behaviour for a little girl upon the playground; such terrible be-

haviour for a little girl anywhere! Go in, instantly!"

Callie, burning-faced and panting, faced her teacher for a single instant. Then she burst into tears and started for the schoolroom. Not, however, before she had seen Elizabeth Ann fly to the safe refuge of Miss Culbertson's arms, and heard Miss Culbertson's sympathetic, "You poor darling! What has that terrible child done to you?"

Callie, once in the haven of her seat, buried her head in her arms and wept. Her sobs welled up from her very shoe soles. For perhaps the twentieth time since school started, she was in disgrace. How she hated school! How she hated Miss Culbertson! How she hated Elizabeth Ann! Elizabeth Ann, who had golden curls and silk dresses, and played the "pee-ano," and was so obviously "teacher's pet," because, so the third grade whispered, her father was the president of the school board. It was Elizabeth Ann who had originated all the sneers which were directed at Callie by the members of the third grade. The only child of a mother who prided herself that her ancestors "came over in the Mayflower," Elizabeth Ann was all that such a mother would wish her to be, a snob of the

first water. There was a streak of cruelty in her make-up, too, and this new girl, whom nobody knew, who apparently had no "folks" and no real home, except Rose Gables, which everybody knew was "just a harbor for strays"—(Again we quote the mother of Elizabeth Ann) was a fair target for her arrows. To her teacher, Elizabeth Ann, with her artificial manners and winning ways, was perfection, and even her grades were much higher than her recitations warranted, because Miss Culbertson never could bear to see her blue eyes dimmed with tears.

After recess Miss Culbertson took occasion to talk to the class. She talked of the terrible sin of envy, and the terrible things it makes poor mortals do. Should one little girl hate another little girl, just because that other little girl is sweet and good and beautiful? Should one little girl attempt to destroy another child's clothes just because they were prettier than her own? Might not a child with such an envious disposition grow up to be a very wicked woman? Ought not the third grade to learn to cultivate sweetness of soul and kindness of thought? Would it not be well for them—or such of them as had such envious disposition—to spend a few minutes each evening,

...ing quietly gazing into the beauty of God's world, and letting it sink into their hearts? Or a little while each day gazing at a beautiful flower, and inhaling its fragrance, while examples of their own misdeeds weighed heavily upon them?

For a few minutes Callie listened—fiercely. Anger, white-hot and vicious, filled her bosom. Miss Culbertson meant her. Even though she did not mention names, she meant her. Miss Culbertson was not telling the truth. Callie did not care how golden Elizabeth Ann's hair was, nor how pretty her dresses. Elizabeth Ann was not sweet and good. She was no such thing. She was hateful and mean. Callie would not hate Elizabeth Ann if Elizabeth Ann would leave her alone. Miss Culbertson talked on and on. The class grew tired and yawned, and drew pictures of Miss Culbertson. Callie grew tired of listening and muttering, and began to watch the antics of a blue-bottle fly, which buzzed lazily and aimlessly. She wished it would fly in Miss Culbertson's mouth. Only Elizabeth Ann continued to listen to Miss Culbertson. Her white hands were folded demurely on her desk; her blue eyes were meeting with their usual innocent, babyish stare, the tender, in-

derstanding brown eyes of her wonderful teacher; her fair head was resting obediently and attentively against the back of her seat.

The back of her seat was the front of Callie's desk. The blue-bottle buzzed out the open window, and Callie focused her wandering attention on the curls that brushed her desk. Long, delicate curls, they were, spun of the finest gold. Elizabeth Ann was going to have a green silk dress, because with her golden hair she looked beautiful in green. Callie thought of this over and over—green dress, gold hair, green dress, gold hair, green hair, gold dress—the adjectives got twisted in her thought, as Miss Culbertson continued to talk of the evils of envy. Green hair—what would make hair green? wondered Callie, idly. What would make hair green? What made green? Somewhere in memory there stirred the answer, learned in drawing class. "Blue and yellow are primary colors. Blue, combined with yellow, becomes green." Blue—and yellow. Blue—over yellow. Blue, on yellow hair, might make green. Thus ran on Callie's thought processes. Green hair—and a green silk dress. How beautiful! Callie grinned impishly. Surreptitiously stretching forth a hand, she gently lifted one yellow curl,

and dropped it, as far as it would reach, into the well of blue ink on her desk. Then she withdrew it, and allowed it to rest on her desk while she inspected her handiwork. The result was even better than she had anticipated. It was rather a dark shade of green, but when it was thoroughly dried it would be almost perfect. Tentatively she tried the next curl, and the next, while Elizabeth Ann remained deeply interested in the lecture intended for all envious little girls, of whom Elizabeth Ann was firmly convinced she was *not* one. Miss Culbertson would never lecture Elizabeth Ann, so that made the lecture thoroughly enjoyable—for Elizabeth Ann. Callie dipped the last curl but two just as the lecture ended. Those two hung in front of Elizabeth Ann's shoulders, and so were out of reach.

"And now—" ended Miss Culbertson, in a righteous voice, "Is there any little girl who has something to say to the class? Hold up your hand."

Callie held up her hand.

Miss Culbertson nodded and smiled a bit grimly. "I thought so," she said, feeling that she was reaping the reward of her efforts even sooner than usual, "Come up here in front, Callie, where we can all hear you."

Callie came. Once there, she faced the class with a tremor.

"All right, Callie," said Miss Culbertson, "Say what you have to say."

"Yes'm, Miss Culbertson. I—I want you to know I'm not all the things you said about me. I'm not envious of Lizzie—of Elizabeth Ann—and I don't care if she does look prettier than me. I'm smarter than she is, but you just give her higher marks 'cause her father's the president of the school board. I'm trying to make her look even prettier than she is, so's I can prove I don't envy her. If you don't believe me, just look at her hair. I just colored it, so it will 'xactly match her new green silk dress."

Callie was very late going home from school, but she would have been glad to be much later. She would have been glad if she never had to go home. She was the bearer of a letter that was going to bring grief to the heart of Mary Rose. Callie, for all her naughtiness, was deeply devoted to Mary Rose. Callie was much like a kitten. Stroke her fur the right way, and she purred. Stroke it the wrong way, and she scratched. Mary Rose had the heaven-sent gift of tact, and Mary Rose always stroked Callie's fur the right way.

When in the presence of Mary Rose, Callie was wont to form splendid resolutions never again to bring trouble to this good farm. But, once removed from the sight of Mary Rose, and being stroked the wrong way by Mrs. Milton, or Miss Culbertson, or Elizabeth Ann, Callie forgot her resolutions and was clawing and scratching again. Only last week she had promised Mary Rose she would bring no more bad reports from Miss Culbertson, and here was the worst report of all. Callie's behaviour was going to be reported to the school board. Miss Culbertson would not teach such a child a day longer. Callie was going to be expelled. No wonder her face was drawn and worried and her steps lagged.

Rose Gables was strangely quiet. Alois and Fritz were not whistling and laughing down in the orchards, although Callie could see that they were there, picking the apples for the winter storing. They were working swiftly but silently. Lizzie was not singing, "O Lord, I am not worthy," in her queer, high-pitched voice which was always off key. Mrs. Pebbles was not sitting out in the yard in her wheel chair watching the two little Pebbles play "letting the old cat die" in the twin swings on the big maple. The two little

Pebbles, wherever they might be, were as quiet as mice. And Mary Rose was not in her office when Callie, intent on getting the ordeal over as soon as possible, promptly sought her there.

Slowly Callie climbed the stairs, wondering where everyone could be. Voices reached her from the room of Mrs. Milton, and she turned her steps thither, clutching the fatal note as though it were a viper. The talk ceased when she tapped on the door, and soft footsteps crossed the room. Lizzie Wickham, her eyes swollen and red with much weeping, opened it to her.

"Sh!" she warned. "What do you want, child?"

Callie held up the missive. "It's a note from my teacher," she said, "About me. It's for Mary—for Miss Ensley. I can't find her."

"Land! You won't give *her* notes for some time." Lizzie began to weep again, wiping her eyes with her apron corner, and sniffing spasmodically, "Oh, my poor lamb! The Lord have mercy on us! Why should this have to happen to a lass that's so good to everybody? Oh, woe is me, to have to send the word of it to her poor little mother!"

Callie stared at her with a lack of compre-

hension on her pert little face. What was the matter with the woman? It was Mrs. Milton who made explanation.

"Run out and play, Callie, there's a good child," she said, in a kinder voice than Callie had ever before heard her employ. "You can't see Mary Rose now. She's very sick. The doctor just left and pretty soon the health officer will be out to put a sign on the house. We will be quarantined. She is very sick. It's scarlet fever."

The long days of Mary Rose's illness dragged by, and a heavy shadow lay over Rose Gables. Mary Rose was isolated in the east wing, and Lizzie Wickham was her nurse. She begged so hard for the place that the doctor could not refuse her. She might not have the technical training of a graduate nurse, but she had good health, good sense, and devotion to her patient—three qualities not to be under-rated by any doctor. She could take temperatures, give baths and medicines, and she would not fail in her trust. A graduate nurse could do no more. Mrs. Milton took her place at the helm of the house. She, who heretofore had had her meals carried to her on a tray, now came from her seclusion to prepare the meals for the entire family.

Helen helped with the housework, and Fritz found tasks indoors and out. Lizzie stayed in seclusion. The room adjacent to Mary Rose's bedroom had been turned into a combination diet kitchen and laundry, where the sick girl's meals were prepared and her linens disinfected and washed. Mrs. Pebbles, in her wheel chair, took over the family mending, which had been Mrs. Milton's task, and even the two little Pebbles helped somewhat by picking up orchard windfalls, and the potatoes that Alois was digging, carrying the feed to the chickens, gathering the eggs, and doing sundry other little jobs. Callie, too, was busy, but she moved with a brokenness of spirit that was apparent to all. She seemed a wraith of her former self. Mournfully she slipped in and out of the quiet rooms; mournfully she flitted about the gardens and orchards.

"Grieving her heart out," said little Mrs. Pebbles, "Who would have thought such a child would feel so keenly?"

Callie's grief was the more poignant because, in some half-defined way she felt herself responsible for Mary Rose's illness. More than once that summer and fall she had caused Mary Rose trouble. Indirect trouble, it is true, and not intended for her, but never-

theless the brunt of it had always fallen on the shoulders of the young directress of the Gables. Yes, Callie had caused her much worry, and no one knew this better than did Callie. And now Mary Rose might die. Or, if she lived, Callie would be expelled from school, and this would cause her more concern. It might even make her ill again, for Mary Rose felt keenly the delinquency of any member of her little family. Callie, brooding over these things, could not sleep, could scarcely eat, and every day she grew whiter and thinner.

News from the sick room came daily to the breakfast table, when Lizzie stuck her head out of the east wing door just long enough to report her patient's progress. Mary Rose was "not so well this morning"; she had had a "bad night"; her temperature was higher; her temperature was lower; she was suffering from neuritis on the right side and could not lift her hand; her ears were aching. And then there was a day when everyone walked on tiptoe and spoke in whispers and tears flowed unbidden and freely. The crisis was at hand. Mary Rose was very low. The doctor came three times that day, and when Mrs. Milton sent the children to bed that night he was still

there. Callie lay awake, staring at the crack of light which seeped beneath her door, until she heard the sound of his car engine and saw his headlights turning down the lane. She slipped from her bed and took her clock to the window to look at its face by moonlight. It was past midnight. She shivered and crawled back into bed, and then she pulled her rosary beads from under her pillow and started to say her prayers. Some time in the early morning she fell asleep.

But at breakfast they could all smile. Mary Rose was better. Her temperature was lower. She was resting. A day or two later she could eat a little custard, and from that time on she steadily improved. Happiness came back to the Gables, happiness for everyone but Callie. Ahead of her loomed the day of reckoning, and she was afraid to face it. The day before the quarantine was to be lifted, and Mary Rose permitted to come from her isolation and be with them all once more, Callie made up her mind. She would run away. A trouble she had always been, but a trouble she would be no longer. Once gone, she reasoned in her childish ignorance, she would soon be forgotten, and Rose Gables would be a pleasant place for everyone. And Mary Rose

would never, never know that she had brought fresh disgrace upon her, and was going to be expelled from school.

That night, when the house was quiet, Callie gathered up her poor little treasures into a market basket which she had smuggled up from the kitchen, emptied her bank of the fifty-nine pennies which had accumulated there, said a "Hail Mary" before her votive altar, and stole down stairs. Like a shadow she stole out the big front door, which she found unbolted. Down the flag stone path to the gate, she crept, almost holding her breath lest she waken some sleeper, and then out the yard gate, and down the lane to the big road, running breathlessly, trembling in every limb, while her heart pounded wildly. And there, at the turn of the road, she ran pell-mell into the arms of Mrs. Milton, who had gone for a stroll to rest her nerves. Mrs. Milton uttered a startled exclamation, and Callie moaned and crouched to the earth like a frightened little rabbit.

"Callista!" cried the surprised Mrs. Milton, "Where are you going?"

But Callie only clung to the earth and sobbed until the old woman stooped and lifted her into her arms, carrying her to a convenient stump by the roadway, and there sat and held

her quietly until the tumultuous sobs ceased, and the trembling body was quiescent and still. Then, in a curiously tender voice, Mrs. Milton said:

"Now tell me all about it, Callista."

And Callie did. Mrs. Milton listened, and varied expressions stole over her features as Callie talked, now softening them, now sharpening them. She frowned when Callie told of Elizabeth Ann and her taunts; smiled a crooked smile at the tale of hair-dyeing; grew tender of eyes and tremulous of lips as Callie told of her feeling that her naughtiness had helped to cause Mary Rose's illness, or at least to aggravate it. Mrs. Milton, while she knew that worry alone could not cause scarlet fever, had a kindred feeling that she, too, had not done all she could to make her young benefactor's life a pleasant one, and she knew how to sympathize with Callie. But she grew tight-lipped and determined when Callie told of the note, the report to the school board, and that she was to be expelled for being "in-couragable"—the nearest that Callie could get to Miss Culbertson's scathing "incorrigible."

"What nonsense!" said Mrs. Milton, sharply, "What utter nonsense! Of course you will be no such thing! *I* shall see to that. I

shall go in to town as soon as this quarantine is lifted, and I shall personally interview the father of this Elizabeth Ann young person, and see that something is done. Lots of sane women are fools about their children. That child's mother is evidently one of them. But I don't believe for a minute that any sane man would want a silly young teacher making such a ninny out of his child as that Miss Culbertson is making of Elizabeth Ann. I shall tell him a thing or two. I shall ask him if it is a crime for a poor child to have no folks. No folks, indeed! What is Mary Rose, I'd like to know? And what am I? Am I not your grandmother? A mighty poor one, so far, but I believe that is what I was hired to be, and from now on I'm going to make an effort to fill the position creditably."

"Elizabeth Ann was right," said Callie, meekly, "I did call her a liar, and ladies don't call liars. And I am a vulgar child."

"You've never had a chance to be anything else," said Grandmother Milton, tersely. "But you are going to do better, Callista. I shall take you in hand and make a lady of you. And you shall have piano lessons, too. "I ——" with a touch of complacency, "was a very accomplished player in my youth, and my old

fingers can still find the notes. As for clothes, a touch of embroidery will make yours as fine as Elizabeth Ann's. They will not be silk, but silk is not suitable for a child. It is, except for very fine party dresses, vulgar. Now dry your eyes, Callista. Go upstairs, unpack your things and put them away, and go back to bed. And sleep well. You shall have everything that Elizabeth Ann has: folks, and piano lessons, and pretty clothes—and manners. And you shall not be expelled from school. Not while Matilda Milton has her health and strength, and is able to use her voice in behalf of justice. And in return, Callista, you will be a lady. Do you understand?"

"Yes'm," said Callie.

"Say, 'Yes, Grandmother,'" said Mrs. Milton.

"Yes, Grandmother," said Callie.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN CHRISTMAS CAME

"AN OLD-FASHIONED sleet storm," said Mr. Ensley. "I'm glad we are all here, safe and warm."

"I, too," said Mary Rose, softly.

She sat on the arm of his chair and gently ruffled his silvering hair with her fingers. It was such a pleasant thing to have all her dear ones assembled here in Rose Gables for the Christmas season. She had thought she would have to spend the loveliest of the year's holidays away from some of them. It seemed impossible to leave her "family" at the Gables, and yet she wanted to be with Mumsey, Daddy, Bess and Bobby. Never but one Christmas had Mary Rose spent away from home, and that away back in her first year at St. Angela's. It had promised to be sad and turned out to be glad—but a Christmas at home was best. This year, just as she was puzzling her head over how she could take all her Gables folk to Friendville, or how she could possibly go and

leave them, Mumsey had magically solved the problem by writing a wonderful message: "Fatten another turkey. We're spending the holidays with you. Daddy needs a vacation." While Mary Rose and everyone else at the Gables were rejoicing over their good news, along came a telegram from Bride: "May Tim and I invite ourselves to spend Christmas with you? Mother and Father unexpectedly called East until after New Year's."

"Hurray!" cried Mary Rose, dancing a jubilant step, "Fatten *two* more turkeys, Al. This is going to be a Christmas as *is* a Christmas."

There were other guests, too. Fritz and Helen had come to her to ask:

"Do you suppose we'd better invite our old man up here for Christmas, Miss Ensley?"

"Your—your father, Fritz?" Mary Rose had asked, startled from her habitual calm by the idea.

The two children nodded solemnly. "He isn't any good," admitted Helen, "And we'd hate having him around like—like anything. And I guess he was pretty mean to us, but it *is* Christmas, and—and——"

"Or I might go and spend it with him," said Fritz, suddenly, "I'd hate it awfully, in that

dirty old shack, but—but—well, Father Kaley was talking to us pretty strong at catechism the other day about, 'Honor thy father and thy mother,' and I thought—Gee, Miss Ensley, his old man drank, too, and he never had much chanct, neither——"

"Chance, Fritz," corrected Mary Rose, "Of course we'll have him, and perhaps, when he sees you all shined up and good and lovely as you are now, he'll want to live up to you. Write to him tonight, and I'll slip in a note, too, urging him to come. You're good children, and I'm proud of you. As if I could *spare* you to go away for Christmas, Fritz!"

Fritz blushed proudly, and went to write his letter.

Mrs. Milton had invited Araminta Sparks, a friend of her girlhood, who was as plump as Mrs. Milton was thin, and as jolly as Mrs. Milton was severe. Hedda, the shy girl-sweetheart of Alois, had come, too—come to stay. When Advent was over and before Lent began, there was going to be a wedding, and Alois and Hedda were to be the principals in that momentous transaction. Even now there was an air of expectancy about the place, and Helen was planning her bridesmaid's dress. Lizzie Wickham had gone to Friendville to

spend Christmas with Uncle Cal and Aunt Lina Davis, because with so many cooks around, her services were not needed and this was a good opportunity for her to take a vacation. But even with Lizzie gone, the Gables family assembled in the long, pleasant living room before the glowing fire-place, numbered eighteen.

The warm, unseasonable rain of the afternoon had changed, first, to a soft, heavy snow, and then to a driving sleet, urged on by a swift and terrible north wind. The trees and bushes, the fences and telephone wires, the tops and sides of buildings, and everything exposed to the weather, were covered with a heavy coating of ice, and still the storm continued.

"This is going to ruin fruit and shade trees, and give the linemen work for many a day," said Tim, thoughtfully. "Is your phone working, Posey?"

"No, it's been 'dead' this long time," answered Mary Rose. "The wires must have snapped somewhere about four o'clock."

"Listen to the wind!" Mrs. Ensley shivered, "How thankful I am we all went to Confession this afternoon. How we'll get to Holy Mass in the morning I don't know. This is

a terrible night for the Virgin to be going down to Bethlehem."

"And what do you mean by that?" Mrs. Milton laid down her knitting and looked at her inquiringly. "You Catholics have a habit of talking about the Virgin and our Lord and all the saints as though they lived right next door and sometimes you puzzle me."

"They do live right next door, Grandmother," said Callie, who was never to be found very far from Mrs. Milton, and now sat with her close-cropped, satiny head resting against that lady's knee. "That's the c'munion of saints. We talk to 'em and ever'thing. I'll 'splain it to you some time."

"All right, baby," Mrs. Milton stroked the sleek head lovingly, "But just now I want Mrs. Ensley to tell me about the Virgin going down to Bethlehem."

"I know," said Bride, who was versed in all Irish lore, "It's an old Irish legend, isn't it, Mumsey Ensley?"

Mrs. Ensley nodded and smiled. "A story! A story!" cried the younger ones, hastily grouping themselves around her.

"It isn't really much of a story," said Mrs. Ensley, "but there used to be a legend in the households of the simple and pious Irish that

on the eve of Christmas the Blessed Virgin lays aside her beautiful heavenly robes, and puts on the humble garment she wore in her earthly poverty. Then she traverses once more the long way to Bethlehem, seeking the place where her Child may be born. Those who love her, set a candle in the window to light her way, for sometimes she goes this way, and sometimes that—and how sad if she passes *your* way and finds it dark and unlighted. Sometimes, when the way is very rough and stormy, she pauses in some humble home to rest a little, so you must leave the latch string out—and ere she goes her way she will leave a blessed gift, in gratitude for your hospitality."

"I've heard my grandmother tell," said Bride, "that once, when she was a tiny girl, they were sure the Virgin stopped at their house, for in the morning the little brother, whom they had thought dumb, because he was three, and had never tried to talk, could speak. Sure, it was wonderful, my grandmother said, and later, when he grew up, he was the grand priest—"

"Bride, you Irish child!" laughed Mary Rose, "you're always lapsing into the brogue,

and you never got any closer than this to Irish shores."

"And probably never shall," said Bride, "though it's dying I am to cut me name on the Blarney Stone. But blood will tell, and when they named me after the good St. Bridget, glory be to God, they named me well."

"I think that's a beautiful legend," said Helen. "Our teacher was telling us about some place—England, I think—where they have a legend that the little Christ Child walks the earth on Christmas Eve, disguised as a poor beggar, and whosoever ministers to Him in that guise, He blesses, and discloses to them His true identity before He leaves."

Bobby tugged at his father's sleeve. "Don't you suppose Santa Claus has been here yet?" he asked, in a hoarse stage whisper.

Bess and Callie, and the two little Pebbles, who had been casting longing glances toward the folding doors that led into the room which had once been the "sitting room" of the old-fashioned farmhouse, but was now, through carpenter's art, really a part of this modern living room, except for those times when, as tonight, it was shut off for some special reason, listened eagerly for the reply. Mr. Ensley looked at Mary Rose and laughed.

"When was he due to arrive?" he asked.

Mary Rose gravely consulted her tiny wrist watch. "Exactly at seven," she said. "A carrier pigeon brought me the message. Gracious! It is three minutes after seven!"

The children clapped their hands delightedly and sprang to their feet with eager cries.

"Not so fast," cried Tim, forestalling the rush to the double doors. "We have to do this up in state. What, ho, Al! Let us bring in the Yule log."

Solemnly the two marched out of the room. Mrs. Milton seated herself at the piano and began to play softly, and Bride and Helen took up the words of the old English song, "God rest ye, merrye gentlemen, Let nothinge you dismay." The older folks and the younger joined them in the singing, even Mr. Clark surprising them all by leaning over to read the words and then coming in with a deep, rich baritone which no one had suspected him of possessing.

In came the Yule log. It was entwined with green garlands, and decorated with tinsel and ribbon, and a brave showing it made. With great ceremony Mr. Ensley laid the log on the flame of the fire, while everyone, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest,

threw in with it a handful of pine cones and made three magic wishes.

"A wish for your head, a wish for your hands, a wish for your heart," explained Mary Rose.

"And one you may tell, and one you must tell, and one is a deep, dark secret," added Bride.

They wished for many things, some serious, some amusing. Mumsey's was the best, they voted. "Understanding for my head," she said, "and honest labor for my hands until they can work no more—and even the wish for my heart is no dark secret. I should just like it to be big enough to put the whole world in it."

As to the funniest, Araminta Sparks and Bobby tied for the first place. "A hair net for my head," said Araminta, "A full pocketbook for my hands—and the heart to spend it all for myself."

"But you told all three, too," reproached Callie.

"Did I? Well, then, I'll keep the pocketbook," said Araminta.

Bobby wanted straight hair, a baseball, and a red sweater.

"Why the sweater?" demanded Fritz.

"For my heart," said Bobby, "Ain't my heart in me?"

Tim Malone made but one wish. "My head is perfect," he said, "My hands are full now. And my heart—I have but one wish I can make for that, and it is a deep, deep secret." And he looked across at Mary Rose with such a meaning smile, that the others laughed heartily and the bright waves of color dyed the girl's face. It was no longer a deep secret that Tim was in love with Mary Rose.

Mr. Clark, in spite of Callie's pleadings, made no wish at all.

"I don't know how," he said, embarrassed, and they let him alone.

"And now for the caps, Helen," said Bride, when the wishing was over. "They are paper caps of all colors," she explained, as Helen passed the tray of silver-wrapped and ribbon-tied packages, "And if you get the red one, you're the Spirit of Christmas, and give out the gifts—and if you get the black one, you're the Spirit of Gloom, and get locked out in the kitchen until the fun is over."

Bobby sighed deeply. "Wouldn't it be just my luck to get the black one?" he asked, "Wouldn't it?"

But after all, he didn't. He got the red one, much to his joy—and there was no black one.

"I was afraid I'd get it myself," explained Bride, while they were laughing at her little hoax.

Bobby, with a great sense of his own importance, opened wide the folding doors, and a great "Oh!" of rapture ascended to the skies. An evergreen tree that touched the ceiling stood at the far end of the room, and it was loaded with tinsel and snow and glittering ornaments and icicles. Beside it was the Christmas Crib, complete in every detail, St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother bending over the Divine Infant, while low at His feet knelt the three kings, presenting their gifts, and the shepherds clustered in the doorway of the miniature stable. Cattle, sheep, and asses browsed in the straw and lay at the feet of the Child. About the foot of the tree was piled a mountain of packages of every size and shape —packages which, with Bobby's assistance, soon found their way to their rightful owners. Then, when everyone was supplied and the last package delivered, there came the delightful task of opening them. Now the order of things was reversed and the youngest were first, and the elders, last. The littlest ones

would have burst with curiosity had they been compelled to wait. So the little Pebbles opened theirs, and were soon so busy with dolls and drums and rocking horses, that nothing was heard from them for the remainder of the evening.

But the others were not so quiet. Delighted squeals, shouts of joy, exclamations of pleasure, and oh's and ah's of pleased surprise followed one another in rapid succession, until, all too soon, the mantel clock chimed the half hour after nine.

"Family prayer time," said Mary Rose, breaking up the gathering. "The babies must be off to bed, or they'll be too sleepy for church in the morning. Daddy, will you lead the rosary tonight?"

And, one and all, they knelt before the Christmas Crib to meditate on the Joyful mysteries. Even Mr. Clark, who had probably not said a prayer for many times more decades of years than there were decades of beads, mumbled his Paters and Aves too, and once Fritz, who found it hard to concentrate for thinking of his new drawing board and set of paints and brushes, caught a glimpse of his father wiping a tear from his eye with a frayed coat sleeve. Mrs. Milton and Araminta

Sparks knelt down, too, and listened to the others.

"Same prayers over and over," said Araminta, as they went upstairs after prayers had ended with the singing of 'Silent Night,' "but they certainly sounded beautiful."

"They say them every night," said Mrs. Milton. "Mary Rose says they are their daily bouquet of flowers for the Blessed Mother. I like to hear them myself. Wasn't this a wonderful Christmas Eve?"

"Wonderful!" agreed Araminta Sparks. "When you landed here, Matilda Milton, you had more luck than sense."

"And I was quite a while getting any sense," said Mrs. Milton, smiling reminiscently, "But we live and learn."

Mary Rose helped Mrs. Pebbles and her two sleepy babies to bed, tucked in Bess and Callie, kissed her mother goodnight, and then made her nightly inspection of the house to see that all was picked up and ship-shape for morning. Then she went to the room which she was sharing with Bride.

Bride, her beautiful hair braided into two heavy plaits, squatted on the bed like the little girl she still was at heart, and watched her with deep affection in her eyes.

"Old dear!" she said, "It's heavenly to be with you a while. I'm almost glad Mother and Father went East, although this is my first Christmas away from home. It's not my last, though," she said, dreamily.

Mary Rose darted a quick glance at her. Then she laid down her hairbrush and came over to sit on the bed beside her.

"When, Bride?" she asked, "When are you going?"

"Soon," said Bride, "In a few more months. Mother wants me settled before she leaves us. You know the specialists say there isn't any hope for her—it's only a matter of time. Mother says since none of her boys would be priests, she at least wants to present her Lord with her one girl. I hadn't told her, because I don't like to leave her when her health is so poor, but she guessed—and one day she asked me, and of course I had to tell her all about it. She sent me post-haste to see the Bishop, and then to the novitiate to see Mother Margherita, and so—" she paused, and her transfigured face told Mary Rose how happy she was that her dream of becoming a nun was so soon to be realized.

A tear slipped from Mary Rose's eye and slid down her cheek.

"You're not crying, honey?" asked Bride.

"No, I should say not," said Mary Rose, defiantly, "Just dare to think I am! I'm laughing—I'm laughing hard as ever I can—" and then she slumped on the bed in a miserable little heap and sobbed aloud.

"Of all the geese!" cried Bride, half-laughing, half-crying, too, as she picked her up and kissed her tears away, "Of all the geese!"

"I always thought I was one," said Mary Rose, when her sobs had ceased, "but I never so completely demonstrated it before. But I'm through, darling. I'll not weep another weep! I don't even know whether I'm crying because you're going, or because I'm not. I wish I could be like you, Bride."

"You're very lovely as you are," said Bride, soberly. "I know a great many people who wish they could be like you."

CHAPTER VIII

CREAKING BOARDS AND PUMPKIN PIES

THE wind had nearly ceased before the household retired, but the outdoors about the farmhouse was filled with icy creakings and crackings, as heavily-laden branches bent low, and occasionally some monarch of orchard or yard crashed with a rending and tearing of limbs and trunk. Mary Rose could not sleep. She lay awake and thought of many things. Of her beautiful trees, being so ruthlessly sacrificed to the cruel ice gods. Of the problem of getting to the village church in the morning. Of Bride, who was so soon to enter upon her life work with the daughters of St. Angela. The icy creakings without, seemed at times to be transmuted to the interior of the house. Once or twice she fancied that she heard a board squeak in the hall, and twice she thought she heard soft footsteps, but when she rose up to listen, she heard no more, and lay down again.

"Imagination," she thought, "The very

house seems alive tonight. I think I am too excited to sleep."

The crash of another tree a little distance from the house brought her out of bed and to the window, but there was no moon and she could not see what tree had fallen. She hoped it was not her favorite sweet apple tree in the lane. And then, because of the darkness without, she thought of the legend about which her mother had told them earlier in the evening.

"I believe," she said, "that I'll set a blessed candle in the window to light the Blessed Virgin on her way to Bethlehem. Who knows? Perhaps she will stop and leave me a blessing as she passes." And, smiling at her own pretty fancy, she put on her shoes and stockings and a warm, woolly dressing gown, and taking a fresh candle from the supply on her closet shelf, put it in a brass holder and started down stairs. She went softly, so as not to disturb either those who slept upstairs, or Mumsey and Daddy, who were occupying her quarters in the east wing. At the foot of the stairs a tall, shadowy figure barred her path. She caught her breath with a little gasp of fright, then laughed shakily.

"Tim!" she exclaimed, "How you frightened

me! Are you an insomniac tonight, too? What are you doing?"

"Sh!" said Tim, "listen!"

A chill ran down Mary Rose's spine—a cold, sick feeling of terror such as had assailed her long, long ago, when she and Bride had put to rout the bats in the trunkroom at St. Angela's. Some one was fumbling at the lock on the front door.

"Thought I heard someone in the hall," said Tim, "and when I came down I heard that. Then I heard you coming and waited. Stay right over here, and don't move. I'm going to open the door and grab that fellow, whoever he may be."

"Oh, no, Tim!" Mary Rose clung to him nervously. "You might get hurt. Let me call Daddy to help you."

"I don't need any help," said Tim. He gently disengaged her hands, and pushed her into the safe corner he had selected for her. Then he approached the door in a couple of swift strides, turned the key in the lock, and flung it open, grabbing the man who stood there and yanking him inside so quickly that he fell upon his knees inside the entry. The man uttered a cry of surprise, but made no struggle.

"Turn on the light, Mary Rose," said Tim.

Mary Rose obeyed. They blinked in the sudden illumination and stared at the intruder, who blinked back at them with a sheepish smile.

"Why, it's Mr. Clark!" exclaimed Mary Rose.

"Yes'm." The father of Fritz, Helen and Callie got to his feet with an apologetic expression. "I'm sorry if I scared you," he said. "I suppose you and this young man o' your'n thought it was a burglar or something like that, but it's only me."

"Well, what in the dickens were you doing out there?" demanded Tim, wrathfully. "Why didn't you use the knocker if you wanted in? Fine night to pick out for strolling!"

Clark hesitated. "I guess maybe I owe you an explanation, Miss," he said, "I was going away. After the wind stopped blowing I thought I could walk it back to town easy as not, and maybe slide out on a freight train. I got up and put on my clothes and started out, and in my hurry, I forgot I'd put all my change under my pillow because I was afraid it'd drop out of my trousers' pocket when I hung 'em over a chair. And when I tried to get back in, the door was locked on me."

"It has a night lock," said Mary Rose.

"Why didn't you knock?" asked Tim, sternly. "You might have got a gunful of buckshot for your pains."

"Didn't want to wake you folks up," said Mr. Clark.

"But why were you going?" asked Mary Rose.

"Well—" the man gazed steadily at the floor and looked embarrassed, "it's this way, Miss. I don't belong. You've done fine for my kids, and I'm not denying it. I always treated 'em like dirt myself, but I guess it wasn't me so much as the likker that done it. When I got the kids' letter I thought it would be pretty soft to come down here for Christmas, and get several days' free board and lodging and a big feed thrown in. And then, when I came, and you all treated me so darned white, just like I was as good as you folks and everything, and tonight, when you said prayers and sung those old hymns, and I see what manner of people you be, I says to myself, 'Con, this ain't no place for you. You ain't good enough to wipe the shoes of that pretty young lady and her mother, and you'd better light out of here. If you freeze getting back to town, so much the better. You won't be any great loss to any-

one, and your kids will do better without you.' And that's why I was going—and that's the truth. If you'll let me go up and get my money, I'll be moseying on."

Mary Rose looked at Tim. Her eyes were full of tears.

"We won't let you 'mosey on' tonight," said Tim. "Our old Prof used to say that when a fellow realizes his shortcomings, he has more than half-way conquered them. Look here, Con Clark! Don't you suppose it made those youngsters of yours feel pretty good to see you here, acting like a man for once in your life? Do you want to go and spoil it all now, and ruin their Christmas? I don't believe you when you say you came just for the 'free feed' and all that. Weren't you just a little bit lonesome for those kids of yours? Just a little bit lonesome?"

Clark smiled. "Expect I was," he admitted, "It wasn't bad when I was drunk, but it was blamed lonesome when I was sober. And I've been sober more than usual this winter because most of the time I didn't even have the price of a drink. I've stepped over so many times, fellows are getting afraid to give me a job, any more. I've been out of work all winter."

"But you'll stay tonight, Mr. Clark—and

perhaps longer," said Mary Rose. "The children wouldn't understand if you went away, and we don't want their Christmas saddened. We'll have a talk before Daddy goes home, and perhaps we can do something about getting you work. We will need more help here soon, and you could have the place, if—if—"

"If you'll be man enough to behave yourself, she means, but is too polite to say it," said Tim, grimly. "Isn't that it, Mary Rose?"

"I shouldn't have put it so crudely," said Mary Rose, "but I—yes, that is exactly what I mean."

"And listen here, Clark," said Tim, "if she gives you a chance, and you fall down on it, and get drunk all over the place, I'll mop up the earth with you. Understand?"

"Tim!" said Mary Rose.

"Don't blame him," said Clark. "If I do, I hope he does. I—"

"Merciful goodness, what's that?" cried Mary Rose.

From the rear of the house there sounded a terrific crash, followed by a series of childish shrieks. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Mary Rose!! Mumsey! Grandmother! Come quick!"

"Bess and Callie!" cried Mary Rose.

In less time than it takes to tell it, the three

in the front of the house had reached the back. The room whence issued the cries was the pantry, and it was in total darkness, but Mary Rose found the light switch and turned it on.

"Oh!" She collapsed hysterically on the door sill. "Oh, did you ever see such a mess? Oh, Bess! Oh, Callie!"

There on the floor, wild of eye, and face, and figure, sat, or rather, sprawled, both little girls, and upon them and under them, and all round about them, were pumpkin pies. Not pumpkin pies in their original state, sweetly browned and fragrant, as Hedda had set them on the shelves that morning, but pumpkin pies in pieces, gobs, cascades, puddles. Pumpkin was in the hair of the children; pumpkin plastered their features and rivuleted down their nighties; pumpkin flooded the floor; flakes of crust clung to the walls, spattered with, and held fast by more pumpkin.

"Pumpkin, pumpkin everywhere, and not a bite to eat," quoted Tim.

"I was showing Bess," explained Callie, when enough of the pumpkin had been removed from her eyes and face to permit her to see and speak, "how many pies Hedda had baked. I told her twelve, but she wouldn't believe me. And we got the flashlight, and came

down the back stairs, real soft and easy, and when we got here Hedda had put the pies on the very top shelf. So I held the flashlight and boosted Bess, and she climbed up on the shelf to see them—and—and—the shelf broked—and the pies came down—"

"I should say they did!" exclaimed Tim, roaring with laughter. "Come here, fat child." He picked up Bess and resumed the task of wiping off pumpkin where Mary Rose's mirth had forced her to discontinue it, "You two are 'some pumpkins,' aren't you? You'd have saved yourself a lot of trouble, Callie, if you'd just climbed up there yourself and thrown the pies down, one by one. Pantry shelves were not built for fat folks like Bess to climb."

"What happened?" asked Mumsey, hurrying in with Daddy Ensley at her heels. "Is that *my* child?" as Tim gravely presented her with the pumpkin-stricken Bess, "Oh, baby, what have you done? Have you broken any bones?"

"Nary a bone," said Mary Rose, still laughing. "Only a pantry shelf—and some pie crust. I may say quite a lot of pie crust—several yards of pie crust—"

"Not to mention a good night's slumber," said her father. "Children, children! Make

way there!" For by this time all the household had assembled in the kitchen, "These two young ladies have an important engagement with the bathtub."

"I'll take Callie," said Helen, seizing her sister and following in the wake of Mrs. Ensley and Bess, "You sinner! I'd like to spank you!"

"Don't scold her, Helen," said Mary Rose, "I haven't had such a good laugh in months."

"Gosh, what a waste of good pie!" lamented Bobby. "Tain't midnight yet, is it, Pose? I won't be breaking my fast if I just get a spoon and scrape up some of it. Hedda just scrubbed this floor yesterday."

"Bobby! You'll do nothing of the kind," said his sister, indignantly.

"Besides," said Tim to the disappointed youngster, "you couldn't make any real headway with a spoon, Bob. You'd have to have a scoop shovel. Never mind, Hedda," to the girl, who was wringing her hands and surveying the wreckage of her pies. "Everyone always eats too much turkey to have any room for pumpkin pie, anyway. Where's the scrub bucket? I'm an elegant scrubber, ma'am. A dollar a day and my kape is all I'll be asking—and ye can put the dollar in the Christmas collection."

"I'll help," said Fritz. "Go on back to bed, Miss Ensley. You must be tired out."

"Tired nothing," said Mary Rose, "I couldn't sleep a wink—not after this hectic night. You canned all that extra pumpkin, didn't you, Hedda?"

"Yes. I thought I'd use it for New Year pies," said Hedda.

"How lucky! I'll use it for Christmas pies right now. What's the odds if the hour approaches midnight? Christmas is here, and we must have pumpkin pies. Shoo! Off to bed, the bunch of you! Miss Ensley is in charge of the kitchen."

"I'm helping," said Bride, "I'll poke the fire."

"Lovely! After you're through scrubbing, Tim, nail up the shelf again. Let's see: flour, lard, salt, eggs, sugar, milk, spices. Dig them out, Bride, while I run upstairs and put on a house dress. Who wants to bake pies in a bathrobe? It simply isn't done."

Two hours later four laughing young folks climbed the stairs to bed. Downstairs the pantry floor shone as white and clean as though no pumpkin catastrophe had ever come upon it, and high on the restored shelf there cooled twelve delicious, tempting pumpkin pies.

"It might be a dream," said Mary Rose. "The children are sleeping, the pantry is clean, the pies are there, the kitchen is in order. I think it *is* a dream. That which we remember never happened."

"I'd believe you," said Tim. "if it weren't for the flour on the end of your nose."

"Merely a dash of powder," said Mary Rose, "Good night, Fritz and Tim."

"You mean 'Good morning,' don't you?" asked Tim.

"Well, then, good morning. And Merry Christmas!" said Mary Rose.

She was nearly asleep when Bride tugged at her arm.

"Posey," she whispered, "Know what we forgot?"

"No, what?" asked Mary Rose, sleepily.

"We forgot to put a candle in the window to light the Virgin on the way to Bethlehem."

"I tried to," said Mary Rose, "But people and pies conspired against me. Tell you 'bout it tomorrow—I mean today. Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas, honey," said Bride. And they slept.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE COMES CHERRY-PICKING

TELEGRAM from Mary Rose Ensley, Rose Gables, Martinsburg, Ohio, to Timothy Joseph Malone, Malone and Hood, Attorneys-at-Law, Buckeye Building, Toledo, Ohio: "Please hire six cherry pickers and two helpers for canning. Send down on evening train Tuesday. Measles epidemic here. Can't get pickers. Fruit spoiling on trees. Mary Rose."

Reply from Timothy Joseph Malone, Malone and Hood, Attorneys-at-Law, Buckeye Building, Toledo, Ohio, to Mary Rose Ensley, Rose Gables, Martinsburg, Ohio: "Commission cheerfully accepted. Cherry crew coming as ordered. Had to hire disreputable lot but good man in charge. All have had measles. Tim."

When she read this message Mary Rose first smiled at Tim's nonsense and then breathed a sigh of relief. The telegram to Tim had been a desperate last resort. The cherry trees were

almost bending to the ground with the heavy crop, and there was no one to care for them. Fritz, Helen, Callie, and all the neighbor children, it seemed, had measles. Her three proteges were about well, but still confined to a darkened room because of their eyes. Practically all of Mrs. Milton's time was taken up with the care of the three semi-invalids, and all her tasks had been assumed by Hedda. Lizzie, in the kitchen, could not be expected to can alone the several bushels of cherries which the Gables would need for winter use, nor could Alois and Mr. Clark (who was now a full-fledged member of the Gables family, and manfully living up to his promises to do better) spare the time from the plowing and late planting, and the other chores which fell to them, to pick the cherries.

"And just when we need to conserve, and save every bit of food we can possibly save," said Mary Rose, "it seems positively sinful to see all that fruit go to waste."

The conservation need of which Mary Rose spoke was a need which was to be impressed upon the minds of the country's housewives and home gardeners many, many times during the next few months, for dark clouds were hovering over America now as they had long hovered

over less fortunate countries over seas. On Good Friday of this year Congress had declared war. Already the more impetuous young men of the country were rallying to the colors, and many older men were quietly setting their affairs in order, in preparation for that day which was not far distant, when they, too, would leave their families behind them to go "over there" and help make the world "safe for democracy." A shadow rested over the hearts and minds of all thinking people. Even though one had no one near and dear who was of fighting age, yet it was not easy to see the loved ones of friends and neighbors donning the khaki and turning their faces toward the far land from which they might not return. No one was so remote from the war that it did not touch them. The boy who delivered the groceries, the lad who sold you postage stamps, the son of your next-door neighbor—all these would soon be over there where grim Carnage and gruesome Death stalked hand-in-hand. Mary Rose did not like to think of it. These boys that were going were of her generation. They had been her playmates in pinafore days. They were the sweethearts, the husbands and the brothers of her friends.

But this sunshiny day in July as Mary Rose

waited on the station platform for her "cherry crew," there seemed no place in all the world for trouble or worry. Here on the little depot platform, where the baggageman whistled as he ran out his trucks, where pretty girls in summery dresses waited for someone, where freckled, sun-browned newsboys played "mibs-in-a-ring" while they waited for the "Up-Bound" with its cargo of dailies from the city, a hundred miles away, no somber clouds from the Somme or Argonne as yet cast their shadow. Mary Rose, with that friendliness which was her chief charm, sat on the depot lawn with the ticket agent's daughter, alternately conversing with her and offering advice and criticism to the young marble experts who played on the gravel near them. Once she even possessed herself of a shooter and tried "a shot for luck," laughing with the boys at her failure to score. Until the train whistled she had nearly forgotten her errand to the station. Then, with a sigh, she returned to life and its realities. Her cherry crew was coming —a "disreputable lot," Tim had said, and she dreaded meeting them. If the men had not been so busy in the fields she would surely have delegated the task of meeting them to Al. But she must put up with them, unpleasant though

the task might be, and she was grateful for the fact that they had "a good man in charge." Doubtless he would oversee them, and she would be glad to pay him extra for his trouble. "I'll just be a 'straw-boss,' " she said.

The train stopped and disgorged its passengers. There was the usual odd assortment of them. Drummers, with sample cases in their hands and fat, black cigars clenched between their teeth; an old-young lady who might be a vacationing school teacher; a group of laughing young people with week-end cases; a tired mother, with too much baggage, and three or four lively children. Mary Rose gave these but a passing glance, her gaze passing beyond them in quest of her disreputable lot of cherry pickers. But there were no more incoming passengers. The handful going out from Martinsburg mounted the steps and the brakeman picked up his small stool and followed them. Mary Rose turned away in disappointment. Something had happened to delay her workers. If it rained tomorrow the cherries would be ruined. Many of them were already spotted.

"Hi, there!" called a laughing, familiar voice, "Aren't you even going to speak to us?"

"Mart Kinney!" Mary Rose turned in de-

lighted surprise and gave him both her hands in greeting, "You here? Of all people! What a surprise!"

Then she drew back quickly and stared at the others with him, for he was one of the laughing group of young people whom she had barely noticed as they came from the train.

"It was the funniest thing!" said Bride, who was next in line, "You looked right at me—and through me—and beyond me, as nice as you please. It's a fine friend you are!"

"Yes, I though you'd at least have a hearty welcome for an old classmate," said Margaret Mary Mulligan, kissing her on both cheeks, "I've a notion to go back on the next train, my feelings are so wounded or I would if I wasn't so hungry. I thought perhaps you'd feed your cherry workers well, and I'm dying for a square meal. I don't really know much about canning cherries, but I'm the most willing pupil. Sister Boniface taught me to be so—and if you'll just give me lots of wholesome food—"

"I'm a picker of parts," announced her cousin, Pat Mulligan, coming up behind her, and unceremoniously deposing her, "Hello, there, Mary Rose Ensley. Do I get a kiss, too?"

"I don't think so," said Tim Malone, with an emphasis not to be denied, "not while I'm around. Well, here's your crew, Posey. I told you they were a bad lot, but I'll keep them in order. I'm the good man in charge. Where are the cherries?"

Mary Rose looked at the mirthful faces before her, and her astonishment was comical to behold. There were eight of them, Tim and Bride, Mart Kinney and his sister Ellen, Pat and Margaret Mary, and the two Felton girls, Felicity and Genevieve, who had been day-pupil classmates of Mary Rose, Bride and Margaret Mary, but whom she seldom saw except at class reunions.

"It's the greatest joke," said Felicity, "Tim called us up and asked us if we could pick cherries and can them. I told him I could can them beautifully, right from the trees, but he said that wasn't what he meant—"

"We were wild to come," interrupted Genevieve, "just as soon as he explained. Felice and I haven't been doing a thing this summer except tennis and a little golf when we feel ambitious enough to run out to the Country Club. Mother has an old-fashioned idea that it isn't genteel for ladies to work. I want to take up a business course and be a sten-

ographer, but you ought to hear her ideas on the subject."

"She was simply stunned when she heard about your farm," went on Felicity, with her usual extravagance of speech, "and you have completely revolutionized all her ideas, I am sure, for she has always admired you tremendously, and has no doubt at all about you being a lady—and when we told her we wanted to come down and help you save your cherry crop, she just wilted and murmured a faint, 'Yes, yes, go on.' "

"Be quiet, Felice," admonished her sister. "Mary Rose has opened her mouth at least five times to say something, but you won't give her a chance."

"I haven't a thing to say," said Mary Rose. "I'm too completely 'flabbergasted.' Tim is always playing tricks on me, but not all of them are so delightful. I'm so happy to see you all I don't know how to express it—and I'm afraid the cherries will go to waste while we are jabbering about old times. Let's run along—" squeezing Bride's hand, happily, "Lizzie and Hedda are waiting supper. Oh, that reminds me—" A mischievous smile illumined her face, "You'll have to eat in the kitchen. Tim said you were such a rough lot that I thought per-

haps you ought not to eat with the family in the dining room because you might swear or talk roughly in front of the ladies and children, so I had Hedda stretch a long table in the kitchen, with sawhorses and planks, and Lizzie is going to wait on you herself. She says she'll know how to deal with your kind. I'm so sorry, but, of course, since you are only cherry pickers, you'll have to put up with what you get."

A shout of laughter greeted her speech.

"That will do very nicely for the others," said Tim, "but the overseer always eats with the family, doesn't he?"

"If he does," said Pat Mulligan, solemnly, "There'll be a funeral in the morning. What's good enough for me is good enough for you, and don't you forget it."

The cherry-picking and canning, which had promised to be such a chore, became a work of pleasure.

"Will you listen to those young ones?" said Lizzie Wickham, harkening to the joyous shouts that floated to the house from the crimson orchards, which were so rapidly being despoiled of their luscious fruit, "This is fine for Mary Rose. She's been working too hard this spring and summer, and a little relaxation is

what she needs. This place is too much responsibility for her, and so I told her mother, but she *will* do it. When the war's over, I hope it'll be different. She's too young to be tying herself down to this work."

"I think so, too," said Mrs. Pebbles, who was getting stronger every day, and was now able to walk a little, with the aid of a cane, "She ought to be marrying one of those fine young men out there, and having a home and family of her own, instead of spending all her time looking after others. Don't you think so, Miss Bride?"

"She will be," said Bride, who was busy pitting cherries. "But I'm sure she has never thought of it yet. Mary Rose is different from most girls. Tim has been in love with her ever since I can remember, and so has Pat Mulligan, and I know of at least three young men in Friendville who think there is no one like Mary Rose—and they are right in thinking so—but not one of them knows "where he is at," as our hired girl used to say. If there is someone she likes better than anyone else, she has never even breathed it to me, and I think I know her better than anyone does, with the single exception of Mumsey Ensley. I've al-

ways hoped it would be Tim, but I don't know."

Neither did Tim know. At this very moment, Tim, looking down into Mary Rose's lovely, upturned face, as she stretched up both hands to take the heavily laden bucket of cherries which he had just finished filling, was wishing with all his heart that he did know. Wishing, too, that he, whose tongue was ever ready with badinage and jest, could render it as facile in wooing. Three years ago, on Mary Rose's graduation night, he had threatened to propose to her in three more years, when he should be ready to "hang out a shingle of his own." Now a position as junior partner in his brother's law firm was his for the taking, and a brilliant career seemed offering itself to him. But June time had come and gone, and still he had not found the courage to speak the words he so longed to speak. He was not at all sure she would say "Yes," and if she said "No" —well, it was going to be pretty hard on Tim Malone. She had always been sweet and sisterly to him, in the same way she had been sweet and sisterly to all the fellows. There was nothing of the coquette in her—and how was a fellow ever to know where he stood, if he didn't have the nerve to ask? And yet—was

it fair to ask her now? He hadn't told anyone, not even Bride, but in two more weeks he and Pat, and Mart Kinney, and a score of the old St. James' boys were leaving for camp. A few months—perhaps only a few weeks, and they would be embarking for the Old World and active service. Some would come back, straight and strong and well, as they went away. Others would never come back—and others—would return, but how much better if they didn't—for they would drag back crippled bodies, wrecked minds, blighted souls. Was it fair to ask a girl to wait—for that? And yet, how could one leave without knowing that the one girl was waiting? It was all a strange, hopeless muddle—one of those tangles only God can straighten, and He in His own good time.

Pat had no such scruples. Pat was going to ask her while they were here. He had warned Tim before they left Toledo.

"I can't go without knowing, old fellow," said Pat. "I haven't much hope—and I know how it is with you. But I have to find out how she feels toward me before I go to camp. If I go down there now it's going to be a fair field and no favors. I think I ought to tell you. Is it O.K.?"

"A fair field and no favors," said Tim, matching level gaze with level gaze, "and if it can't be I, I'd rather it were you than any other man."

"Thank you, old fellow," said Pat, giving his hand a hearty clasp, "and the same to you."

"Oh!" Felicity got off a step-ladder and rubbed her shoulders and arms with a grimace of pain, "I can't reach up a minute longer. I'm going up to the house with you, Pose, and send Bride down here to take my place, while I pit a while. I'll ruin my manicure, but who cares?"

"Cherry-pickers can't be choosers," called down Pat from his ladder in the high branches, "Did you ask Overseer Malone for a permit to leave the orchard, Miss?"

"I'd like to see him stop me," said Felice, "I begin to believe Mother's right. Labor isn't genteel. Are you going to take that truckload of cherries to town, Pose?"

"I think so. I may as well. I often drive the truck when the boys are busy, and it is necessary that I look after the billing myself. It's time to start with them, too, for they will have to be shipped out on the three-ten. Who is going along to handle the crates for me?"

"I will," volunteered Mart Kinney.

"You mean *I* will," amended Pat, scrambling down from his ladder with suspicious alacrity.

"Don't you want to go, too, Tim?" asked Genevieve, with a provoking smile toward the high-up Tim, "I think it's most uncomplimentary the way all you boys are willing to tear yourselves away from our charming society and tag along with Mary Rose. I suppose it's because we are just day-laborers, and she is a landed proprietor. You're just after her money."

"I'm staying here," said Tim, gruffly, and went on with his cherry-picking.

Mary Rose looked up at him curiously, with a half-smile on her lips. Gruffness was not like Tim. But she could not see his face, so she turned to Pat.

"You may be only a cherry-picker," she said, "But I'll not go with you if you don't scrub up. I don't expect my hired help to wear starched collars, but I do expect them to wash their faces. Race you to the house."

"Done!" cried Pat, "And I'll beat you to a frazzle to pay you for your insults," and he was off like a flash, leaving Felice and Mary

Rose to trail laughingly along behind and carry all the cherries.

It seemed to Tim, picking cherries with a swift concentration that was almost ferocious, that Pat and Mary Rose were gone a long, long time. The pain in his heart grew keener, and when he let his thoughts dwell on what Mary Rose's acceptance of Pat's suit would mean to him, his eyes burned and his throat ached. At last the cheery honking of the truck horn told that they were returning, and a little later he glimpsed the flutter of Mary Rose's red middy tie as the two came slowly down from the house. They were talking earnestly, with their heads close together, and Tim's heart contracted with a great dread—and then he caught sight of Pat's face, and his heart load lifted miraculously. Here was no dazzling light of happiness, but only a mask of gaiety, and in Pat's eyes there lurked a sadness that would never again be entirely absent from their depths. It was a sadness that touched Tim to the quick, and made him sad because he was so suddenly, overwhelmingly glad. Pat had failed.

"Hurry, you two," called Ellen, "I'm waiting for someone to take my pail of cherries.

What *have* you been doing, Pat? Building castles in Spain?"

"Not today," said Pat, "I built mine long ago, and they have all tumbled down. Mary Rose and I have just been strolling through the ruins."

"I wondered what took you so long," said Genevieve, "I suppose it was climbing over the fallen beams and shaking the loose plaster from your shoes."

"Something like that," said Pat.

The cherry frolic was over. The last cherry had been picked. The last cherry had gone, either into the can, or away to market, and now the "disreputable cherry crew" stood by the depot and waited for the train that would take them away from Martinsburg and Rose Gables—and Mary Rose.

"It's been a glorious holiday," said Ellen, "It was work, but it was fun. I, for one, am willing to come back next year and do it again."

"I, too," said Felicity.

"Wish I could," said Mart, "But probably we fellows won't be here. We won't be unless the war's over."

A sudden silence fell on the laughing, chat-

ting group. A shadow had passed before their sun. Another year—what might not another cherry-time bring?

"Let's go and get weighed on that machine over there," said Genevieve at last, "I'm sure I must have lost a few ounces, I have worked so hard."

"But I ate so much," said Margaret Mary, "Posey feeds her help too well. Come on, Pat. You can furnish the pennies."

Tim and Mary Rose, left alone, looked at each other for a long minute. It was Mary Rose who bridged the silence.

"Tim," she said, holding out both hands to him with a single impulsive gesture, "Haven't you anything to ask me before you go?"

"Mary Rose—" began Tim, huskily, unable to believe his ears.

"You told me, three years ago, on Commencement night—remember? But I knew I'd have to remind you of it. Men are so forgetful. If you think I'm going to let you go away to war and meet some French girl—Oh, Tim! Are you going to make me do *all* the proposing?"

"I think we'd better all go right back and get weighed again," said Margaret Mary, returning hastily to the group she had just quitted,

"We aren't wanted back there. Tim's kissing Mary Rose."

The last wisp of smoke vanished on the horizon. Mary Rose, her eyes shining with happiness, and her cheeks wet with tears, watched it vanish. From a cook-car on the sidetrack near the depot a phonograph record sang lustily the song which all America was singing,

"Keep the home fires burning,
While your hearts are yearning,
Though your lads are far away, they dream
of home.
There's a silver lining
Through the dark clouds shining.
Turn the dark clouds inside out till the boys
come home."

"That's my job," said Mary Rose, softly, and, moving as in a dream, she climbed into her car and drove slowly out the pleasant, winding road to Rose Gables.

FINIS

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